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Indian Churches at the Cross-roads

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Editorial

Indian Churches are at the cross-roads and the future depends on the options we make today. 1992 July Number of *Jeevadhara* discussed some of the important problems, issues and questions the Churches face in India: the impact of the collapse of the socialist movement in Eastern Europe and the disintegration of the Soviet Union on the leftist and radical movements within the Churches; further clarifications of the concept of Evangelization and its relation to Dialogue and Liberation; growth of the charismatic movement and the recent upsurge of religious fundamentalism; challenges the 70,000 religious women face in the Catholic Church; the kind of leadership expected from the Catholic Church in India in the context of ecclesial pluralism; problems and tensions among the three Catholic Individual Churches in India, the Syro-Malabar, Latin, and Syro-Malankara; the crisis in priestly formation today.

This July Number 1993 continues last year's discussion, for which some other issues have been picked up: Why do Christian Dalits revolt today, and what stand should the Churches take on this question? If other religions are accepted as legitimate 'ways of salvation', what is the meaning of the Christian doctrine of the Uniqueness of Jesus Christ? Rethinking Christianity in India is an important challenge facing the Churches today. What are the responses of the Churches and theologians to this issue? There is a widespread dissatisfaction about the present day theological education imparted by our Seminaries and theological Faculties. How should we restructure the present system, its method and curricula? There appears to be a conflict between Indian classical spirituality which is more self-centred and contemporary liberation spirituality. Are they really in conflict or do they complement each other? Similarly, new People's theologies vis-à-vis traditional theologies present another challenge. The Church's option for the poor has no credibility unless the present ecclesial structures and praxis are radically changed. India's age-old culture, philosophies and religions, well-known for their holistic and integral approach, would be a significant contribution towards an eco-theology which is essential for the survival of humankind and our planet Earth.

We are indeed privileged to be on the threshold of the third millennium. But it is a frightening experience to be at the cross-roads without knowing the options and possibilities and what the future has in store for us. Our readers are invited to participate in this ongoing discussion so that we may be able to face together the present challenges with creativity, imagination, confidence and courage.

Christian Dalits in Revolt

The Christian Dalits are doubly discriminated. They are denied their rights, privileges and reservations granted to their counterparts by the Government. They are alienated from their own Churches as they have been denied their rightful place in the Church and in its decision-making bodies, and they are socially, economically and culturally oppressed. The Church is controlled by the dominant classes and the higher and powerful castes. The author makes an urgent call to the Churches to reverse their anti-Dalit stance and commit themselves to the liberation of Dalits on a war footing.

Introduction

In recent years the Dalits who constitute the great majority in the Christian Community in India have become a restive people, although an open defiance of the leadership of the Church is limited to certain parishes, dioceses and denominations. The cause of this widespread discontentedness among them is often explained in terms of their economic, educational and pastoral demands on the Church, persistence of religio-cultural discriminations against them within the Christian Churches, Church's failure to protect them against the atrocities of caste people, and their under-representation in the decision making bodies in the churches. Though these explanations are true as far as the every day life of the Dalits are concerned, these should be understood more as the symptoms of the disease than the disease itself. The root cause of the disease has to do with the Church's perception of its role and ministry and the consequent failures in its policies in the post Independent India.

In this paper I would like first of all to deal with these policy perceptions as an exercise of self-examination. It needs to be debated within Churches. Secondly, I will give a short account of the recent response of Dalits to the problems faced by them.

Historical background

In the pre-independent India, the Dalits/Tribals¹ embraced Christianity largely in mass movements in different parts of the

1 The Dalits and Tribals are constitutionally two distinct groups. Though there could be sufficient reasons to justify this present distinction, in terms of their own past history, of their struggles against economic and social

country. One of the major considerations that weighed with them in favour of Christianity was the political patronage some of the missionaries offered them against the traditional cultural and economic oppression within the Hindu society. In other words, in Christian Missionary work the Dalits/Tribals saw an instrument of their social liberation as it was perceived to be a source of power which could counter the caste power in the villages. Resentment of the Dalits/Tribals against the old order and the missionaries' tacit or open support for them made the Dalits feel that they have a patron and ally in the missionaries.

This subjective perception of the Dalits/Tribals was not shared neither by the churches nor by the missionaries as a whole. There was no unanimity of opinion within the Churches as to the nature and significance of caste. While some called it anti-Christian, others understood it as part of the social structure of the Indian society which has its roots in the ethnic composition of the country. Its economic and political undergirding and its legitimation by religion was passed off as not of much consequence. As different churches and denominations concentrated in different regions and among different ethnic or caste groups without a common understanding with regard to the phenomenon of caste, they themselves often became a new vehicle of caste contradictions already existing in the society at large.

On the other hand, the socio-economic, occupational and other cultural differences between the Dalit/Tribal majority and the non-Dalit minority Christians made up of the Syrian, Mangalurian, Govan as well as the caste converts from such groups as Chettys, Vellalas, Thevars, Reddies, Kammas, Nadars etc. enabled the minority Christians to benefit for the most part from the higher education given by the missionaries and they formed a second leadership in the churches.

At the dawn of national independence, the caste Hindu leadership replaced the imperial power. Under the democratic set-up, this leadership under the guidance of M.K. Gandhi wanted to co-opt the Dalits to maintain the Hindu majority. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar who foresaw the danger of the caste dominance in the new political order in India, argued for constitutional safeguards in the form of separate electorates for the Dalits. This demand known as 'communal representation' was compromised under the stiff opposition of caste Hindus led by Gandhi and a compromised formula of political reservations and quotas in jobs and education were agreed upon under the Poona pact.

oppression and of their movements to claim their rightful place in the nation, it is better to understand them as one people, the earliest inhabitants of the sub-continent or the indigenous people of our country, with the exception of some tribal groups. For this purpose in this paper I have put the Dalits and Tribals as one word with a stroke.

Churches' policy and its impact on the Dalit Christians

At this juncture the Church saw itself as a minority group. Its main anxiety was to protect its right to profess and propagate its faith, to run its educational, medical and service institutions. It wanted to project itself as a loyal minority serving the mainstream rather than protecting its own sectarian interests. This idealistic theological stand ignored the highly fragmented sociological nature of the Indian Christian Community and the Indian society in general, made up of endogamous ethnic groups which are unequal economically, politically and culturally. The practical outcome of this policy was that the all India church leadership was taken over by the small minority in the church largely made up of non dalit castes and communities, which was particularly true of the churches like the Roman Catholic, the Orthodox, the Marthoma and other mainline protestant Churches. While B. R. Ambedkar defended the Depressed classes' rights, this christian leadership surrendered the Depressed class Christians' rights for special reservation as the caste Christians did not feel the necessity of having special reservation as they were able to participate in the political process and developmental activities along with other caste people². This leadership did not consider the historic lesson that the churches' right to propagate the faith largely worked in the past mainly with the disprivileged Dalits/Tribals and these are the people in India who are waiting for the 'good news to the poor', 'release to the captives' 'to be set at liberty'. Though it preached the Nazareth declaration, it did not historically place its mission in terms of flesh, blood and people. It did not occur to the Church that the only people in need of social deliverance in the Indian situation are the Dalits/Tribals as they were the ones culturally oppressed.

Under the same illusion of universality of faith and practices the minority non-Dalit leadership also denied the Dalits any kind of special reservation within the educational and medical services of the churches. The profession of equality in an unequal church and society — caste society — meant that the powerful castes controlled the church and it ceased to be an instrument of social liberation to the Dalits. On the contrary, the church served the social interests of cultural groups better equipped to make use

2 The reference is to the overall position taken by the representatives of the Church in the Constituent Assembly. There were, however, individual leaders who protested both in the Assembly and outside against the discrimination shown to the Christians of Scheduled Caste origin. Dr. E. C. Bhatti, Secretary of the National Christian Council was one of such leaders, efr. Dalit Christians Struggle for 'One Man One Value', position paper presented to the General Body of the Catholic Council of India, by Br. Jose Daniel.

of the enormous material and cultural resources of the Churches. It was a qualitative change from the days of pre-Independence.

The non Dalit leadership also set the theological agenda for the churches. All attention was paid to understand the brahminical religious traditions and systems of thought which were understood to be the Indian heritage. It did not occur to them that the brahminical scriptures, law books, religious rituals and practices traditionally played the role of legitimizing and maintaining an hierarchical caste consciousness and inequalitarian caste structure which is directly linked to the economic and political inequalities of our society. It did not occur to them that the so-called untouchables/Tribals of India belonged to the earliest strata of Indian society and the religion of the dominant castes played an historic role in the cultural subjugation of these original inhabitants. It did not occur to them that a true Indian Christian theology should start from the traditional heritage of the Dalits/Tribals who are desperately yearning for their liberation in history. It did not occur to them that the religious history of the Dalits/Tribals would reveal that some of their gods and goddesses condemned caste and caste practices, that they have heroes who were victims of caste oppression, that they have sages who led movements of liberation among them and that some of their myths, stories, songs, proverbs and rituals are clues to their history of economic and religious subjugation when rightly interpreted with the help of other material evidence.

The churches in the name of indigenisation in its liturgy also drew from the anti Dalit/Tribal traditions which naturally eliminated their symbols and practices as of low order. In short, the church seemed to have decided to exist within hierarchical caste structure of the traditional Indian society and its culture.

The over all effect of this policy was that the Dalits became disappointed and alienated within the churches. They became a flock without a shepherd. On the other hand, the caste Hindu leadership cleverly used their political patronage often with the active support of non-Christian Dalits to withdraw any kind of political, economic and educational support the converts were enjoying as Dalits or Tribals. A case in point is that the Malabar pulayans as a scheduled tribe were enjoying the benefits of reservation even after many of them converted to Christianity. During the emergency by an act of parliament with effect from 27-7-77 they were rescheduled as scheduled caste with the intention of denying the benefits of reservation to those among them who converted to Christianity. The Church in India, including the local church did not even come to know of these developments, let alone voice any protest on behalf of the concerned people, who all of a sudden found themselves refused jobs and education. Another instance is that major churches in Kerala were opposed to radical land

reform bill brought by the Marxist Government in Kerala in 1957. The churches actively supported with other conservative religious forces in the so-called liberation movement to throw out the Marxist Government. The church proved itself anti-Dalit and was perceived as such by the Christian Dalit community. In this paper I cannot go into the details of this anti-Dalit stance of the churches.

The response of the Christian Dalits

The result of this policy on the Christian Dalit community was a general sort of alienation from the churches, which took many forms. In regions where Marxist/Naxalite movements were strong the educated Christian Dalit took to those movements, in some areas en masse as in Kerala. A sizable section of Christian Dalits all over the country converted to Hinduism to claim the benefits of reservation. Still others left the mainline churches under the leadership of caste Christians to form their own little pentecostal or denominational groups where they felt at least psychologically free to be themselves.

A small minority of Dalit Christians following B. R. Ambedkar understood their problem as both economical and religio-cultural. They rejected the class approach because their experience taught them that the class movements in India were incapable of bringing about a genuine class alliance of Dalits/Tribals and the rest of the poor across caste barriers. The ideological jargons and programmes of the class movements have no agenda of breaking the religious, cultural mould of caste in which all Indians transact and order their every day life. A mere conversion to other religions — a religio-cultural approach — they found inadequate as all these religions as social realities function within the class-caste structure of the wider Indian society. In short, any movement for the empowerment of Dalits/Tribals who are only the historical victims of caste class power structure, has to be solidly based on their own resources. It can only receive the goodwill and voluntary support of individuals from the rest of the society if it has to fulfil its historic mission of breaking the old mode of caste-class power. This kind of conceptual clarity, however, does not offer a practical agenda as the illiterate, poor Dalits/Tribals had been made to understand their ethnic-tribal roots and peculiarities in terms of caste categories and are divided among themselves.

This leaves the Dalits/Tribals with a civilizational problem where one can only give general guidelines as Doctor B.R. Ambedkar did. His mahavakya was: Educate, Agitate and Organise.

Educate: The content of this education has to include the true history of Dalits/Tribals, their cultural heritage, the nature of their enslavement, its religio-cultural undergirdings, the character of the emerging political structure, the necessity of Dalit/Tribal participation in the political process.

Agitate: As they suffer from a number of material and cultural deprivations, the only way to remedy the situation is to agitate as a social group against such deprivations experienced in manifold ways in their daily life.

Organize: It is in the process of agitations around concerns and issues that they can forge unity and strength as one people.

All the same the Christian Dalits have identified their problem as two-fold. The State discriminate them by denying them the benefit of Reservation given to other Dalits belonging to Hindu, Sikh and Buddhist traditions. While the Church made representations and submitted memorandums to the Government, it cannot be said that it mobilized all its resources to champion the genuine demand of the Christian Dalits. Even when the late Shri G. S. Reddy in 1977 and Prof. P. J. Kurien in 1983 moved in the Lok Sabha private members bill for amendment of Para 3 of the President's Constitution Order 1950 the Church did not exert its moral pressure and organize a wider publicity campaign. However the situation has recently changed. In 1985 Christian Dalit Liberation Movement organized a national convention in Delhi which was followed up with annual regional conventions in different regions and a number of consultations and agitations. In April 1986 the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India meeting at Goa decided to observe 'Justice Sunday' on the Sunday after Independence Day in August to highlight the plight of Christians of Scheduled Caste origin.

Lately two national organizations have come together to mobilize political support for the cause of Christian Dalits. They are 'All India United Christians Movement for Equal Rights' and 'All India Christian Peoples Forum'. They are organizing national conventions and rallies besides lobbying MLAs and MPs to undo the wrong done to the Christian Dalits, besides conducting seminars and symposia to educate the Churches and the Christian Dalits in particular. While the Christian Dalits do not expect the church to be the vehicle of promoting their economic and political rights, they expect the church to morally and financially support them so that they can get their rights recognized by the Government.

Justice within the Christian Church

The Dalit / Tribal demand for justice within the Churches has fortunately been growing and becoming ecumenical in nature embracing all churches and denominations since the middle of the seventies. The leadership in the Churches are becoming uneasy at the continued existence of anomalies in the form of separate burial grounds, chapels for the Dalit Christians, non absorbtion of Dalit candidates into religious congregations and bodies. The All India United Christians Movement for Equal

Rights spelt out their demands under twelve headings. Though much of it is specifically couched in terms applicable to the Catholic Church in India, *mutatis mutandis* it expresses the genuine demands of their brethren belonging to other churches as well. It includes demands for separate commission for SC/ST/BC concerns from national to parish levels, a policy of reservation applicable to all Church institutions, specific programmes for the empowerment of the Dalit Christians in the form of financial grants, eradication of illiteracy, leadership training etc. In short, they say that "the Church in India as a whole must declare an internal emergency and engage herself with time bound programmes and evaluation for the liberation of the Dalit Christians on a war footing".³

About the theological direction the statement says "Indian inculturation, indigenization and adaptation in search of personal bliss and peace or natural heritage should not remain at the Hermitages and Ashrams but should lead to the identification and living with the millions of SC/ST and BC Christians who form more than 90% of the Christians in India and then alone we can discover the Indian Christ and the Paramatma through their culture and aspirations."⁴

Dalit Theology in India generally identified the crucified Christ in the situation of the Dalit/Tribals in India today. It realizes the risen Lord would be recognized in the Eucharist only when the participants abjure their sin of caste consciousness. A Christian challenge that applies as much to non-Dalit Christians as to the Dalit Christians themselves. Let us hope that by the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ we can grow up to meet this challenge which might bring renewal and renaissance not only to the Churches but to our country and civilization as a whole.

C. I. S. R. S.
Bangalore.

A. M. Abraham Ayrookuzhiel

3. Br. Jose Daniel, Dalit Christian Struggle for 'One Man One Value', Position Paper presented to the General Body of the Catholic Council of India, 1993.

4. Ibid.

The New Encounter with Other Faiths

The Christian approach and attitude to other religions has undergone a radical change in our times. Other religions are widely accepted as legitimate ways of salvation to their adherents. In fact, there are biblical and theological foundations for such a positive approach. Other religions may be viewed as concrete social and historical manifestations of the universal salvific will of God. If salvation is possible and available outside the Church, what about the uniqueness of Jesus Christ? Although a Christian theological language may be legitimate for Christians, the need of the hour is to lay a strong foundation of a movement to promote interreligious dialogue and harmony by creating a common theology of religions.

Those who watch the Indian scenario will observe that the history of religions in India today is in a paradoxical situation. On the one hand, there is a strong movement towards religious fundamentalism and communalism which is very often instilled, inflated, manipulated, and abused by all the political parties for their own gain in political power. The sudden rise of Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), Shiv Sena, and similar militant groups and movements among the Moslems, Sikhs and others, the demolition of the Babri-Masjid on December 6, 1992, and the brutal killings and bomb-explosions in Bombay have radically changed the religious and cultural history of India. On the other hand, there is a widespread movement towards inter-religious harmony and dialogue, based on the increasing conviction that the central message of all religions is universal harmony, peace and fellowship of the whole humankind and that religions shall no more function as walls dividing peoples but as bridges linking them to one another. There are thousands of activists spread throughout India, cutting across all religious and ideological boundaries and committing themselves for the cause of justice, human rights, liberation and inter-religious harmony and thus discovering the essential meaning of religion. If we do not want that the fundamentalist and communalist forces control the destinies of our nation, we have to lay a solid cultural, philosophical and theological foundation of a movement for interreligious dialogue and harmony.

A radical change in the Christian approach to other faiths

The discovery of other faiths and the question of their role in the universal salvific plan of God is the most serious challenge to contemporary Christian theology. Christian approach to other faiths has, in fact, undergone radical changes in history. In Christianity's encounter with other religions, we could identify three distinctively different stages: At the first stage Christianity with its absolute and universal claims, considered other religions as a threat to its own existence, survival and growth. Hence they were looked upon in a completely negative way as "false religions", "merely man-made", or "magic" (human attempt to control and manipulate the divine), or even as "devil's work". In the 16th century the great missionary Saint Francis Xavier wrote, "the true God cannot dwell among heathens or hear their prayers...the idols of the heathen are of the devil and they must be destroyed at the first opportunity"¹. At this *first stage* the missionary policy was one of conquest of territories and peoples who had to be converted by any means, and rejection, condemnation and destruction of other religions.

Christianity had a closer look at other religions during the modern period when all religions were seriously studied by various sciences such as history, anthropology, sociology, psychology, phenomenology and philosophy. Christianity began to acknowledge and accept the findings of these sciences. At this *second stage* other religions were accepted to some extent as containing truths and human values, but they were not seen on a par with Christianity. Other religions were considered as simply human and natural whereas Christianity claimed itself to be divinely revealed, supernatural, and thus the fulfilment of all other religions.

Today we are at the third stage in the encounter between Christianity and other religions. Plurality of religions is accepted today not only as an irreversible historical fact, but also as a theological principle. Different religions have their origins not only in the different historical and cultural contexts of different human responses, but in the very inexhaustible mystery of God who cannot be contained by any single religion. At this *third stage* Christianity acknowledges and accepts other religions as "religion", and as "ways of salvation" to their respective members. The one God, Creator of all, who created every human being in his own "image and likeness" wishes to save all without exception, who effectively guides and sustains all people leading them to the same destiny. If one believes this, then one has to admit that God is actively and effectively present in all peoples and cultures and

1 W. Buehlmann, *The Church of the Future : A Model for the year 2001*. New York : Orbis Books, 1986, p. 45.

religions. All religions are in fact activated by the saving Spirit of God and have a salvific role to play in God's plan of salvation, though all religions may equally become distorted due to human sinfulness. The Second Vatican Council in its Dogmatic Constitution on the Church teaches that salvation is available to all those who strive to do the will of God "as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience"². The Council's Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions acknowledges that all religions "reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all, and exhorts the members of the Church to acknowledge, preserve and promote the spiritual and moral goods" in other religions³. On the salvific role of other religions the Catholic Bishops of Asia made the following declaration:

We accept them (the Great Religions of Asia) as significant and positive elements in the economy of God's design of salvation... over many centuries they have been the treasury of the religious experience of our ancestors, from which our contemporaries do not cease to draw light and strength... And how can we not acknowledge that God has drawn our peoples to Himself through them?⁴

Theological foundations for the new approach

The new positive approach to other religions, accepting them as legitimate "ways of salvation" is indeed a radical change in the history of Christian theology. But if we search the Scriptures and theological sources we may be able to find certain fundamental indications that legitimate this new approach, and they are precious and extremely significant.

The first thing we have to do is to re-discover and expose the roots of the exclusivism and absolutism of Christianity which can be found in Jewish exclusivism and absolutism. Israel believed that they alone were the "Chosen People" of God. No contact with other peoples and their Gods was allowed. The strict monotheism of Israel and their constant fight against the polytheism of their neighbours forced them to adopt such a negative, exclusivist and absolute attitude. Although Christianity succeeded in overcoming the narrow Jewish nationalism and ethnocentrism by opening its doors to all other peoples, races and cultures, it continued its universal and absolutist claims and the totally negative attitude to other religions. Sociologically and psychologically speaking this attitude of exclusivism and absolutism is a natural technique of all new religious movements

2 *Lumen Gentium*, No. 16.

3 *Nostra Aetate*, No. 2.

4 *Statement of the Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences*, Taipei, 1974.

for the survival, growth and preservation of their own historical identity, especially in the context of the aggressive presence of other dominant groups. It must also be remembered that most of the World Religions had originated and grown up in homogeneous and mono-cultural societies in isolation from one another. The fact that they now exist side by side in pluralistic societies calls for a new relationship among them for their mutual benefit and for the common cause of humanity.

A few points from biblical and theological sources that would support and justify a positive approach to other religions may be mentioned here.

1. The universalism of the creation story (Gen. 1:1-2:4) that there is only One God who is the creator of all and the biblical anthropology that man is created in the "image and likeness of God" suggest and call for a basic openness to all peoples, as they all have the same origin, nature and destiny. The God of creation is the God of salvation who continuously sustains, inspires and redeems the whole creation which includes the cultures and religions of all peoples.
2. God's covenant with Noah is clearly universalistic and cosmic. It was with Noah, with all his descendants and with every living creature that survived the flood (Gen. 9:8-10, 15). In Noah, father of the new humanity, God blessed the entire humanity, all their endeavours including all cultures and religions.
3. In Genesis Chapter 10, in the first version of the story of the Tower of Babel, the "Priestly Writer" sees the multiplicity of the nations and languages as something good, as a blessing of God, as the fulfilment of God's covenant with Noah. This positive look at the plurality of nations and languages includes also plurality of cultures and religions which are good, mutually complementary and enriching.
4. The Book of Jonah is a beautiful parable of universal salvation, a vision Israel developed later during the exilic and post-exilic period. Yahweh rebukes Jonah and tells him that the Ninevites who are called pagans are also his people and he wants to save them all.
5. Some of the great personalities and Saints of the Old Testament were from the so-called gentiles or pagans: Ruth, a Moabite woman became the great-grand-mother of King David. Sadok who became the high priest of the temple of Jerusalem was formerly a Jebusite priest. The "holy man" Job was an Idumean and Melchizedek was a Canaanite priest. Old Testament thus recognizes that holiness belongs to other religions too.
6. The Kingdom of God which Jesus proclaimed and inaugurated is not limited to Israel and the Church, but it is a wider

reality which includes the whole humanity renewed and recreated by the "conversion of hearts", not simply conversion from one religion to another. The Church only continues the ministry of Jesus by proclaiming the Kingdom of God. The Church is for the sake of the Kingdom; it has to build up and give way to the Kingdom of God.

7. In his conversation with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well (Jn. 4:1-42), Jesus clarified the concept of true religion and true worship. Jesus challenged the exclusivism and fanaticism of both Jews and Samaritans, and invited them to purify both religions and worship — worship of the Father "in Spirit and Truth", i.e., "in the Spirit of Truth". Jesus is announcing here a new ecumenical era when the Spirit will gather the whole humankind as children of the One Father, irrespective of the different religions they belong to.

8. The central message of the New Testament is that salvation is offered to the whole humankind, not limited to a particular group. All are saved by "faith" which is the human response to God who reveals Himself to every person in the core of his/her heart. This faith demanded by the New Testament need not be for everybody an explicit acknowledgement of Jesus Christ as one's God and Saviour. St. Paul writes that the knowledge of God is natural to man (Rom. 1:16-23), and that there is no discrimination between Jews and Gentiles at the final judgement: to the Jews the norms of judgement will be the Law and to the Gentiles the law written in their hearts, i.e., their conscience (Rom. 2:72ff). "God is not a respecter of persons, but in every nation he who fears Him and does what is right is acceptable to Him" (Acts 10:34-35). Again, in Matthew, chapter 25, in the judgement of the Nations, the norm of the final judgement is the small acts of charity done to the least of our brothers and sisters.

9. In the early Christian centuries the Alexandrian Fathers, especially Justin and Clement of Alexandria, taught that as God guided the Hebrews by Moses and the Mosaic Law, so He guided the so-called pagans by the philosophers and their wisdom. According to the "logos theology" of these Fathers everything is created by *logos* and this *logos* is present in everything and everybody, and those who are guided from within by this *logos* will see the truth and be saved. It is this same *logos* which became fully manifest in Jesus Christ⁵.

10. In the medieval period St. Thomas Aquinas, the greatest theologian of the Church, taught that every truth comes from the

5 Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* I, 5; VI, 17, 153:1; Justin Martyr, *Second Apology*, 10.

Holy Spirit and hence we have to accept wherever they are found. He also taught that all articles of faith are implicitly contained in the primary matters of faith, i.e., God's existence and providence. Belief in the providence of God includes all that God has done and is doing for us in history which contains implicitly what God did in Jesus Christ⁷. This principle of Aquinas implies that for salvation it is not absolutely necessary to have explicit faith in Jesus Christ.

Outside the Church salvation is possible

"Outside the Church there is no Salvation" is the traditional theological dictum formulated by Church Fathers like Origen and Cyprian and later endorsed by many official Church documents⁸. But Vatican II apparently rejects this teaching. When speaking about the salvation of non-Christians it says that "God gives them the necessary help for salvation if they lead a good life and live according to the dictates of their conscience"⁹. But on the other hand the Council repeats the traditional teaching about the necessity of the Church for salvation⁹ and proposes a concept of the Church as the "People of God" which includes the whole humankind, but in different grades¹⁰. This broader and inclusive concept of the Church would weaken the visible, sacramental and institutional character of the Church. The Church, the people of God in the broadest sense as the Kingdom of God cannot be equated to the latter, though they are closely related.

It must also be noted here that the traditional dictum, "Outside the Church there is no salvation", was originally addressed to the members of the Church who had rebelled against the true Church, and the salvation of the non-Christians was not under its purview. Besides, there are other Church teachings which acknowledge salvation outside the boundaries of the visible Church: in the case of a Jew who baptized himself, Pope Innocent III (1206) directed that his baptism was invalid. But he added that the rite or sacrament of baptism was not necessary for salvation. Man is saved by faith of which baptism is only a visible sign¹¹. When Jesuit Fr. Feeney in the United States taught that 'Nobody outside the visible Roman Catholic Church will be saved' Pope Pius XII condemned his view¹². The Second Vatican Council emphasized what is common to all religions and what promotes fellowship among them. According to the council the Church

6 *Summa Theologica* II – II, Q. 1, Art. 7, and Q. 2, Art. 4–6.

7 Lateran Council IV (1215); Boniface VIII in *Unam Sanctam* (1302); Council of Florence (1442) etc. See Denzinger – Schönmetzer, No. 02, 60–75, 1251.

8 *Lumen Gentium*, No. 76.

9 *Lumen Gentium*, No. 14.

10. *Lumen Gentium*, No. 14–16.

11 Denzinger-Schönmetzer, No. 621–624.

12 *Ibid.*, No. 3866–J3.

looks with respect upon those "ways" which often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all. The Council called for dialogue and collaboration with other religions by which the Church should "acknowledge, preserve and promote the spiritual values among other religionists"¹³.

The Catholic Church has always taught the "universal salvific will of God", namely, that God wishes to save all without exception. It is not a wishful thinking, but the effective will of God which takes concrete shape in history in the socio-historical forms of different religions. The different religions are therefore divine-human and are concrete "ways of salvation". If other religions can be considered as "channels of revelation", they could be equally "channels of salvation", for God's revealing Word and saving Word cannot be separated.

If other religions are "legitimate ways of salvation" to their believers, Christianity has an urgent task and obligation to re-examine its missionary style and praxis. The thrust of our mission must be to relate positively to other religions in healthy dialogue and collaboration. Mission should not simply be understood as conversion from one religion to another, though every individual has the right and freedom to change his/her religion. When we accept other religions as "legitimate ways of salvation", it does not mean that all religions are equal *de facto*. All religions, including our own, can become distorted, and it is the task of each religion to prove its authenticity in dialogue with each other. So on the historical plane some religions may be better than others; some ways may be clearer and more effective. But to each convinced devotee his/her "way" is the best one.

Question of the uniqueness of Jesus Christ

It must be made clear here that there are still many Christians and Churches who believe strongly and sincerely that salvation in the full sense is given only in Christianity and that Jesus Christ is the one and only saviour. But the majority of the Christian Churches are inclined to think today that salvation is possible also outside the boundaries of the visible Church; but it is given only in, through and for the sake of Jesus Christ, because in the present economy of salvation all saving grace is given only in and through Jesus Christ who is the only Saviour in the full sense. The grace which is given to the believers of other religions in their own religions is "Christic". Jesus Christ is working not only within the Church, but also in other religions in a mysterious way. Other religions have therefore a place in God's plan of salvation, but they all have to be transformed and completed by

13 *Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions.*

Jesus Christ. This view is usually called *Inclusive Christocentrism*, because according to this all humanity is included in Jesus Christ.

There is today a minority of theologians who claim themselves to be the avant-grade and question the main line Christocentrism and call for a "paradigm-shift" in understanding the universe of religions, a shift from Christianity-centred or Jesus-centred model to a God-centred model or *Theocentrism*. They see Christianity as one among the many historical religions. Everything historical is limited and finite. So no one religion can claim to be absolute and final. All religions flow from the ineffable mystery of God who is the centre. They see Christocentrism as a Christian absolute claim which is unacceptable to the believers of other religions and as a serious obstacle to interreligious dialogue. They also argue that the central message of the New Testament is the Kingdom of God and Jesus himself was theocentric. Jesus of Nazareth need not be the one and only saviour; there can be other names and saviours. The theocentric schools try to establish the validity of the plurality of religions and question the absolute claims of all religions.

The uniqueness of Jesus Christ is therefore the most crucial question in the new encounter of Christianity with other Faiths. Can Christianity remain true to itself without Christocentrism? Could a committed Christian be open to revelations outside Christ and in other religions? Can Christians compromise the so-called normativeness and finality of Jesus Christ? Could there be other names and saviours beside Jesus Christ? How do we understand the uniqueness of Christ in the context of today's religious pluralism? I do not pretend or dare to answer these questions. Nor do I think that anybody has got clear-cut answers today to these questions. In the years to come, Christian theology will be struggling with these and similar questions. Let me just make a few tentative conclusions:

1. Every faith is absolute for its believers who would naturally and spontaneously make absolute claims; it is legitimate. So Karl Rahner's thesis of "Anonymous Christianity"¹⁴ (i.e., Non-Christians are also in fact saved by Christ although they may not know it. So they are not really non-Christians, but anonymous Christians) is a legitimate approach only for Christians. It is natural for a Christian to look at the believers of other religions from within one's own faith. The "Rainbow" model proposed by Raymond Panikkar clarifies this point. Plurality of religions is like the rainbow. Each colour in the rainbow represents a religion. Suppose Christianity is represented by the red colour. Looking from within the red colour, everything else will look red.¹⁵

14 Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, Vol. VI, pp. 115-134.

15 R. Panikkar, "Man and Religion", *Jeevadhara*, No. 61 (1981), pp. 5-32.

For a Christian every other religionist may be an anonymous Christian. But we must equally respect and accept the faith claims of the people of other religions. If they call Christians "anonymous Hindus" or "anonymous Buddhists" or "anonymous Moslems", it should not be considered arrogance or fanaticism.

Looking at people of other faiths from within one's own faith may be seen from a different angle. It need not always be an act of self-imposition or arrogance. It may be seen positively as a way of expressing our love and relationship. Let me take the case of, say, a Hindu friend of mine. We are so close that he is part of my family. Occasionally he takes part in our prayers and religious celebrations. All the family members hold him very dear, dear to God whom we experience and worship, dear to the heart of Jesus Christ, and we are sure he would be protected, blessed and saved by Jesus Christ. Our relationship is reciprocal. I too, in turn, am very close to his (Hindu) family of which I am part. They hold me very close to them, close to the God they worship, close to the heart of Lord Rama, and they pray and tell me that the Lord Rama would protect me and shower his blessings and saving grace upon me. I do not say that those who propose the theory of "anonymous Christians" express such a spirit of mutual relationship of love. I only want to say that looking at people of other faiths from within one's own faith is natural and spontaneous, and need not always be an act of self-imposition or arrogance, but it can be an act of genuine love in a religiously pluralistic society. But this approach is not enough for fostering the movement towards interreligious dialogue and fellowship and for creating a common theology of religions. This last point I am discussing below.

2. There is no question of jettisoning or compromising the uniqueness of Jesus Christ in the new encounter with other faiths. The place and role of Jesus Christ in God's plan of salvation is unique and universal. The way Jesus is and his message are not only for Christians, but for the whole humankind. Jesus demand from all "the conversion of their hearts". All have to break the inner walls of their selfishness and turn themselves to God and their neighbours if they want to be saved. In a similar vein I would say that Koran, Hindu Scriptures, Buddha's teaching etc., have also a unique place and role in God's plan of human salvation; they are not only for Moslems, Hindus or Buddhists, but are meant for the whole humankind as they all have universal significance. The uniqueness and universal significance is not something to be granted, but something to be proved and established by history. So there can be different levels of uniqueness and universal significance. Everything we mentioned above need not be set on the same pedestal.

3. The mystery of God and that of the Second Person of the Trinity, the Christ, the Logos, the Word, cannot be exhausted by the history of Jesus of Nazareth. In Jesus God emptied Himself and took a finite human form. Jesus did not cling to his equality with God (Phil. 2:6-8). What Jesus said and did in his humanity was therefore limited by the finiteness of human nature. As in his humanity he was conditioned by the history and culture of his times, his words and deeds cannot be strictly considered as absolute and final in the philosophical sense. What has been revealed in the history of Jesus has to be supplemented by God's revelations elsewhere in other religions and vice-versa. All these have to be still completed by what God reveals to us today through His ever-living and moving Spirit. Besides, I believe that the mystery of Christ is not exclusively possessed by Christians; this mystery encompasses all people and the whole universe. We have still to grasp the depth and width of this mystery which is being revealed in its fullness. In the unfolding revelation of the mystery of Christ, other religions do play a role, and this is one of the important prospects of interreligious dialogue.

4. Looking at other faiths from within one's own faith may be natural and legitimate. There can be then a Christian theology of other faiths, a Hindu theology of other faiths, an Islamic theology of other faiths etc., and these different denominational theologies may be in conflict with one another. Although these theologies could be the starting points for interreligious dialogues, we shall not stop there. Such dialogues and movements have to articulate a common theology of religions. The exclusively Christian or Hindu or Islamic religious languages will not be adequate for a strong foundation of a movement for interreligious dialogue and harmony. We shall have to create a new language in order to understand and explain religious pluralism, relationship among religions and the very meaning of religion. Here the "theocentric" and "soteriocentric"¹⁶ theological languages may be significant, beneficial and productive. But any such theology of religions could come only from a religiously pluralistic context where different religions are mutually, fully and whole-heartedly involved in interreligious dialogues, interreligious liberative movements and interreligious programmes of inculturation.¹⁷ No genuine theology of religions can be evolved without collaborative praxis

16 John Hick, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Raymond Panikkar and Stanley J. Samartha may be considered as representatives of the "Theocentric" trends and Paul Knitter proposes a "Soteriocentric" (Salvation-centred) approach as some religions do not have the concept of "God",

17 This point is emphasized by the two Statements of the Annual Meetings of the Indian Theological Association held in 1988 and 1989. See, *Religious Pluralism: An Indian Christian Perspective*, edited by Kuncheria Pathil, Delhi: I. S. P. C. K., 1991, pp. 324-349.

coupled with indepth reflection. In this process of interreligious collaboration and mutual fecundation, all religions will be challenged to rethink, reinterpret and revise their traditional theologies, and all religions may be transformed in the act of discovering each other fully. India is the fertile soil of the major world Religions and here this process of interreligious collaboration, dialogue and mutual fecundation has been taking place for several centuries, and it is India's privilege, prerogative and special call to create a new paradigm of fellowship of people of different religions and evolve an authentic theology of religions. How the Indian Churches respond to this call at this critical moment of history is of vital significance for the future of the universal Church.

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Rethinking Christianity in India: An Assessment of Indian Attempts

The author of the article critically reviews the Indian attempts at rethinking Christianity, which have only a short span of history. The classical attempts of the pioneers were mostly to "Indianize" Christian Theology in terms and categories of the Vedas and Vedanta. Such attempts in their spiritual quest generally subscribed to one of the three classical Indian ways, viz. jnana, bhakti and karma. The author presumes to pass a judgment of liberation theologies of India today as Indian only in name, unlike the Karma Marga followed by Gandhi and others. But he hopes for a day when real rethinking of Christianity will emerge.

In recent decades there have been some very serious efforts to give Christianity in India a genuine Indian expression in its spiritual and theological aspects. The efforts themselves are evidence enough to show that there is a general recognition of the urgent need of such expression, and the results likewise are proof that some advance has been made, although it must be admitted that what has been so far accomplished is only a beginning, and that there is a long way yet to go.

As to the spiritual and theological aspects of the Indian expression, it is clear that they are by no means separable. However, some tentative separation is necessary in studying the two sides of the development. The term "rethinking" in the title signifies that what is attended to in this piece in some tentative way concerns the theological side only.

The title "Rethinking Christianity in India", clearly echoes a book by that name, which was published by a group of Indian Christian writers in Madras, under the editorship of D.M. Devasahayam and A. N. Sudarsinam (Hogarth Press, 1938). But, while reference to this book would certainly be made, the theological re-thinking in its larger history which is continued even now quietly and in fairly interesting ways will be taken note of and a few suggestions about future possibilities be made.

Rethinking has had, as its objective, the "Indianization" of theology mixed with some apologetics. In the best expressions of re-thinking, constructive use of Indian (meaning Hindu) religious and philosophical ideas has been made liberally.

The history of this movement goes back to a century ago, with the then (and still) controversial work of Bhabani Charan Banerjea of Calcutta, later known as Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya (1861-1907), who like his uncle, the national leader, Kali Charan Banerjea, was a Bengali brahman who converted to Christianity. Brahmabandhab has re-emerged into Christian theological attention in India in recent decades. A few things have been written about him and his main ideas. His own works have been published.

He brought Sankara's Advaita—or, rather, the way he understood it—within the ambit of Christian theological thinking, and did so very earnestly. In religion he tried to remain a Hindu (Vedāntin) and yet be a Christian (Catholic). He wanted to make theology truly Indian. He might be considered the morning star of theological awakening in India. In some ways he was an enigmatic thinker, who, however, thought in stereo-typical ways prevalent in his times, although his earnestness cannot be doubted, nor his contribution under-rated.

Brahmandhab thought within the framework of the natural-supernatural division still very much in vogue then. He assigned to Vedāntic Hinduism the highest place possible in the realm of natural truth, to be completed by the super-natural truth of Christianity, centred on the Incarnation of Christ, and the Atonement wrought by his death and resurrection. "The truths of Hinduism" he writes, "are of pure reason illumined in the order of nature by the light of the Holy Spirit... Though the religion of Christ is beyond the grasp of nature and reason, still its foundation rests upon the truths of nature and reason" (Quoted by J. Lipner, "A Modern Indian Christian Response", *Modern Indian Responses*

to *Religious pluralism*, Ed. H. G. Coward, Albany, N. Y., State University of New York Press, 1987, p. 308). He argued that Vedic theism — which, according to him, is the belief in an all-powerful, all-knowing supreme being, who inspired the *Rishis* — is the first step towards a Hindu natural theology, which reaches its culmination in Śankara's *Advaita-Vāda*. (cf. *op. cit.*)

Clearly, Brahmabandhab's theory was not evolved for the purpose of what is called dialogue today, but solely for the sake of Veda and Vedānta being placed in a constructive relation to Christian revelation, i.e. within the framework of the internal activity of Indian Christian theology. Clearly, this is probably the finest instance of theological rethinking, even before the term 'rethinking' was consciously brought into use.

Decades passed, and rethinking in theology received its public awakening with the publication of the book "Rethinking Christianity", mentioned earlier. The book was a response to, in fact a protest against, the Protestant Dutch theologian Hendrick Kraemer's arch-conservative stand at the Tambaram International Missionary Conference (Protestant) in 1938, systematically presented in his book, *Christian Message in a Non-Christian world*. Kraemer, a disciple of Karl Barth, described his position as Biblical realism, which gave no quarters to any other religion than Christianity. In a later book, he spoke of even the greatest achievements of these religions as "humiliating aberrations" in the light of Jesus Christ (*Why Christianity of All Religions?*, London, Lutterworth, 1962, p. 104, quoted from S. J. Samartha, *One Christ, Many Religions*, New York, Orbis/the Author, 1991/1992, p. 163),

The Rethinking group, under the leadership of Chenchiah and V. Chakkarai, were quite radical in asserting the Indian religions, especially the devotional tradition, as a helping hand to Christianity in India. Chenchiah went to the extent of arguing that the Old Testament — which he felt like an offence to Indian religious sensitivity — must, in the Indian expression of the Christian religion, be replaced by the Vedas. This group of nationalist Indian Christians was subjected to severe criticism by conservative Protestant leaders, missionary as well as native, for a long time, until a few years ago. For Chenchiah, Hinduism is the preparation for Christ. Among his ideas is one pertaining to *Śakti* of Śaivism, i.e., he saw it as Holy Spirit. This *Śakti* is appropriated through Yoga.

Actually, even before the emergence of the Re-thinking group in the late thirties and forties, some voices were heard in Protestant circles too that would have favoured it. One was from J. N. Farquhar, a Scottish missionary who wrote *The Crown*

of *Hinduism* (London, Oxford University Press, 1913), a book which established continuity of Christianity with Hinduism. But these voices were drowned out forthwith. Another voice in favour of integrating Hindu religious elements into Christianity, though quiet but firm and scholarly, came from A. J. Appasamy. Appasamy, beginning to write in the thirties, saw Christianity as needing new expression in India in line and tune with the Hindu *Bhaktimarga*. In that sense he too was a pioneer.

It is in our present theological era which began in the late fifties that Roman Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox scholars have begun to join hands for more comprehensive and constructive re-thinking. A new climate of theological co-operation has come into being. Raimundo Panikkar is certainly one of the pioneers in this effort. Of similar importance are Swami Abhishiktananda (in the contemplative line) and Amalorpavadass (in the contemplative activist line), K. Subba Rao and S. J. Samartha.

Panikkar is not only an Indian theologian but a world theologian. But even in his world perspectives of theology he has made creative use of Hindu ideas. One of his most interesting contributions is his interpretation of *Īśvara* as the Hindu version of Christ, to show that as *Īśvara* Christ is already there in Hinduism but *incognito*. And as such the Indian theologian's task is to make this unknown Christ known. Panikkar makes a daring attempt to show that, although the concept of *Isvara* devised by Vedanta to explain the reality of the world under the category of Transcendent Brahman is the basis, it leaves several problems unsolved, which can be solved only by the concept of Christ.

One of the striking features of modern attempts to rethink Christian theology so that it accords with the Indian tradition is that the theologians in question are in one way or other deeply imbued with some aspect of Vedanta and of Hindu spirituality. The context of their thinking is anything but a vacuum. And it is particularly interesting that they generally subscribe to one or another of the three traditional ways of dealing with the subject of God and the approach to God known as *jnāna*, *bhakti* and *karma mārgas*. Some of them consciously choose one of those *mārgas*, while others, without consciously choosing, seem spontaneously to fall into the pattern of one of them. And whoever invented the three *mārgas* scheme was a great genius, for it covers all possible ways of making the spiritual quest, and nothing falls outside it.

Accordingly, it is easy to see that Appasamy was a thinker deeply imbued with *bhakti* — and that was his explicit choice. Chenchiah makes the same choice, and, for the most part, contributors to *Rethinking Christianity* do too. This is the great Tamil tradition. Another writer who chose *bhakti* is Dhanjibhai

Fakirbhai, a Gujarathi. This writer models his thinking on Christ and his incarnation on the *Avatara* doctrine, enunciated and exemplified in the *Bhagavadgita*. He has put forth such books as *Śrī Khrīst Gita*. K. P. Eleaz, a member of the orthodox Church and one deeply imbued with Advaita and a rising Indian theologian of religion himself, summarises Fakirbhai's ideas: "According to him God can be described as Prajnana or primeval intelligence or following the Fourth Gospel as Logos and for salvation of the humankind God became incarnate; in Jesus prajna became Purnavatara. For him the highest bliss is personal union with God in Christ and to express this experience he has used the term Khrīstadvaita" (K. P. Eleaz, *The Harmony of Religions*, Calcutta, Punthi-pustak, 1993, pp. 174-5). Clearly, Brahmabandhab was one of the originators of this *jnana* line of thought, but not with deliberation. Another theologian in the same tradition is K. Subba Rao of Andhra who deliberately chose the Advaitic, *jnana* path under the term *ananyatva*, which is of the same meaning as *abhedatva*, standard term in Advaita writings, with which he expresses the idea of our oneness with God. He speaks of the death of the ego through *jnana*, and of the way ignorance (*ajnana avidya*) hides our essential oneness with God. And he suggests that this primordial ignorance is what Christians call Fall. He depicts Christ in the manner of a *thirthankara*, who leads us from ignorance to knowledge. And knowledge is really the self-knowledge, *atma-vidya*, of Advaita. As in most of such Christian theological efforts, he achieves his theological transformation to Indian (*Advaitic*) thinking through a series of equations. Although this method is limited to idiom equations and verbal transpositions — true of writers from Brahmabandhab down —, still it is a big step forward in rethinking Christianity in India, which, however, has to be a continuing act, going forward step by step but sometimes faltering too. However, Panikkar, with his excellent philosophical mind and training is genuinely creative and original in comparison. Abhishiktananda's work is also largely made up of such equations and transpositions. In the process of rethinking the core doctrine of Christianity they are no doubt extremely valuable for reinterpreting the Vedantic *Sat-Chit-Ananda* in the light of the Christian Trinity and vice versa. As others, he is following *jnana-marga* but adds the dimension of direct experience (*anubhava*), in accordance with the real test prescribed by Sankara himself — *anubhava avasanatvāt brahma-vijñānasya*, "on account of *brahmajnana* path's consummation in experience".

S. J. Samartha, author of many fine pieces in the area of inter-religious dialogue, and of the excellent book, *One Christ Many Religions* (New York, Maryknoll, Orbis, 1991) is one among those who have a genuine passion for inter-religious amity at a deep philosophical level. But he is also a real vedantist, i. e., with marked leanings towards *jnana*.

The jnana-marga line is also being appropriated today, but without recognizing it. Christians would have naturally taken to this because of their inherent tendency towards activism. Much in modern Hinduism has also prepared the way for this approach taken by some contemporary Christian theologians. Tilak in one way and Vivekananda in another and Gandhi in yet another among others, have been champions of *Karma-marga*, except that they did not separate it from the other *margas*. The so-called Dalit theology of today has the appearance of a one-sided Karma-marga, expressed in some sociology-based, revolutionary terms. But, considering the essentially anti-Brahmanic ideological stand of the Dalit theologians, it is unlikely that they will acknowledge this connection. And, any how, all activism need not have a conscious connection with *Karma-mārga*, although *Karma-mīrga* might claim it back to itself. One of the leaders of this Dalit version of liberation movement is A. P. Nirmal, a Madras-based theologian. Just as the liberation theologians of Latin America would replace all approaches through metaphysics with "people's experience" - of suffering due to class oppression as the base, so would the Indian Dalitists replace Advaita, Viśishtadvaita, Aurobindo's integralism and all that with the experience of suffering of the oppressed and marginalized poor of India as the basis of approach. For theologians of this persuasion thought is not *sui generis*, but is a product of praxis. Nirmal observes: "Knowledge is (therefore) grounded in praxis, of theory and practise, and thought and action. While Dalit Theology, because of its liberation motif, will not question this praxiological basis of human knowledge it would want to affirm that pathos is prior to knowledge". (Doing Theology from a Dalit perspective", The *Journal of SATHRI*, Vol. I. No. 1, January 1961, 63 Miller's Road, Bangalore). This theology is really not re-thinking Christianity in the sense in which those mentioned above are, as it is really the Indian branch of a world-wide movement, except that the people who do it, and the people in whose name it is done are Indian, while the modes of thought are European-Marxist, involving a denial of the entirety of the classical achievements of India. The roots of this kind of thinking is what is sometimes called left-wing Hegelianism, Feuerbach and Marx-Engels being their leading ideologues, but with John Dewey of America supplying his own version. John Dewey's philosophy of activism has found new expression in the "anti-foundationalist" view of such American writers as Richard Rorty. The Latin American Liberationism is an extension of both the above expressions of left-wing Hegelianism, acknowledgedly Marxist and unacknowledgedly and perhaps unknowingly Deweyite too. It is no wonder that the entire Indian philosophy and higher culture are being denounced as almost evil by the Indian liberation theologians. However, this attitude is not desirable for Indian

Christians, for they run the risk of being dubbed anti-Indian. Such a label will not be of help in the task of rethinking Christianity in India. The danger signals are out.

The dust will settle one day and no doubt the poor must be served, i. e. the materially poor by the spiritually pure, who adopt voluntary poverty. And then we will return to the perennial task of rethinking Christianity, at which even today some theologians are silently and devotedly at work. Time-tested expressions of doctrines of the Trinity, Incarnation, Atonement etc. must continue to find newer and newer modes of correspondence with the Indian moulds of *Sat-cit-Ānanda*, *Avatāra*, *Sayūjya* etc. The scope for that is endless. The primary intellectual-spiritual disciplines, preparation to thought, such as the Vedantic *nitya-anitya vastu-viveka* (discrimination of things eternal from things non-eternal), *iha-amūtra-phala-bhoga virāga* (renunciation of the enjoyment of fruits here and hereafter), *mukshutva* (desire for "true" liberation) and *sīdhana-sāmpat* (wealth of moral virtues) will have to be first appropriated for the task. That is the way of the past and that is the way for the future.

Much more than "Indianizing" Christian theology is needed. Christian theology must grow up in the Indian spiritual and philosophical environment, from the seeds of Christian belief — exactly in the way Śaivism, Vaiṣṇavism etc. grew up from the seeds of their respective beliefs. The air and soil of this rich land will provide the nourishment. And as Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism grew to great stature — in theology, devotion and cult ritual — under the umbrella of Vedantic *Brahma-vidya* — so will Christianity, even if it has to assume forms that will make it look very different from Christian theology elsewhere in the world. The mandate to go ahead is clear. And Indian Christian theology will be as Indian as Śaivite or Vaiṣṇavite theology. Thus Christianity, which is one of the oldest religions of India, with beginnings in the first century, will then come to its own theologically. But the way ahead is long and hard. It will involve orientation of theology towards a deeper integration with Indian Philosophy, especially Vedānta, from the roots up, than has so far been accomplished or even visualized.

The Classical vs Liberative Approach to Indian Christian Spirituality

Spirituality as we understand it is the transforming power of the Spirit expressed in our life in the world. The author compares and contrasts the classical Indian approach to Spirituality with the contemporary Liberation Spirituality, and shows that they are closely related and complementary. The liberation of oneself from egoism, attachments, fear, and anger or self-transcendence and the realization of the Divine within oneself are the prerequisites and the source of all our liberative struggles for the oppressed and the marginalized.

India is traditionally known to be a land of spirituality. This does not mean that everything in India is spiritually sound or that India needn't a critical evaluation of its own spirituality. True spirituality is a movement stemming from the spirit; and the spirit by its very nature keeps awakening the consciousness of the human against the situation in which he/she is placed. Critique of one's own spirituality is therefore a constant must which should renew and reorient one's spirituality in accordance with the challenges one faces every day.

The word spirituality already points to the time old dichotomy between matter and spirit. But we cannot have spirituality which is not matter-bound. In fact, spirituality as we understand it is the power of the spirit expressed in our life in the world. Nor is spirituality simply a matter of the spirit, but is essentially the transforming power of the spirit manifested in different spheres of our earthly life. Describing the goal of his ashram Sri. Aurobindu says: "The Ashram is founded not to deny the world but to integrate the ashram in the spirit".¹ However a tendency of escapism from the world was clearly manifest in the Hindu tradition of spirituality. In spite of the incarnational theology in which Christians assert that the Word has really become flesh, a *fuga mundi* spirituality was very powerful in Christianity, especially in its early centuries.

1 Ashram pamphlet, Sri Aurobindu Ashram, Pondichery, p. 1.

Though the human is an inseparable composite of spirit and matter it is the presence of the spirit that makes him/her a human being endowed with the power to reflect, decide and realize. Spirituality recognizes this power of the spirit in human life. The word spirituality as a noun does not occur in Scripture, but the adjective "spiritual" (pneumatikos) does and that too frequently. This word is used "to describe the character of a man who has entered the kingdom of God. Such a man has the Holy spirit as the vital determining principle of his life".² About the working of the Holy Spirit in the spiritual persons Cardinal Newman writes as follows:

He (the Holy Spirit) pervades us (if it may be so said) as light pervades a building or a sweet perfume the folds of some honourable robe; so that in Scripture language we are said to be in Him and He in us.³

St. John of the Cross gives us the following description of a spiritual person:

Such is he that walks love-stricken for God, and that aspires to no gain or prize, but only to lose all things and to be lost to himself in his will for God's sake, which he holds as gain.⁴

The spiritual man, according to St. John of the Cross, leaves himself completely to the guidance of God, namely of the Holy Spirit. In the Christian understanding any genuine spirituality cannot be separated from the work of the Spirit. Spirituality stems from the spirit, becomes a movement, remains ever alive and active and transforms the life and the world of that individual. With this understanding of spirituality as our background let us now analyze two contemporary trends in the Indian Christian Spirituality. These trends as titled in the article are: The traditional Indian Christian spirituality and the new trend of the Indian Liberation spirituality. They both are trends in spirituality and with Indianness as their background. But the vision and the realization of this vision widely differ in these trends. Sometimes they seem even to oppose each other. Hence the need for raising this question anew.

1. The classical approach to Indian Christian spirituality

The encounter of the Christian Spirit with India begins with the beginning of Christianity itself. St. Thomas Christians

2 *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, Vol. II* : "Spirituality" by David Fyfe p. 808.

3 Parochial and plain Sermons, new ed., London, 1868, ii. 222. (cited in the article mentioned above).

4 *Spiritual Canticle*, Trans. by E. Allison Peers (N. Y: Image books), p. 421.

of Kerala claim that they have inherited their christian faith from the Apostle Thomas himself. The Spirit was active and transformative. Thomas Christians developed a Christianity that is very Indian in several aspects especially with regard to Christian architecture, celebration of sacraments, sacramentals and festivals. They also successfully kept up their faith down the centuries in spite of adverse vicissitudes of life⁵.

A movement of Christian spirituality drawing inspiration from the Hindu scriptures with an attempt at rearticulating the Christian thinking in terms of classical philosophies of India is rather new. The pioneers of this movement are mostly western scholars and seekers. The western church came to India with the colonial expansion. The church was charged with a type of missionary zeal which normally looked down upon the non-Christian religions. In the initial phase of this encounter the western studies that appeared were very much prejudiced against non-christian religions of India and was rather motivated by an apologetic and propagative stand of Christianity. This kind of a study cannot lay the foundation a genuine Indian Christian spirituality. Only something that we appreciate can be adopted and integrated into our spiritual system. In the 19th century more and more impartial studies of the oriental religions were taken by secular authors and universities. The famous series of Sacred Books of the East edited by Prof. Max Muller from the University of Oxford is a brilliant example of this praiseworthy attempt. Such an impartial and scientific approach has helped future seekers from the west to delve deep into the heart of the Indian classical spirituality and develop a basis for an Indian Christian spirituality.

With the recent emergence of Indian christian ashrams such a search was also tested by a way of life and thus we have the great contributions of Swami Abhishiktananda and Fr. Bede Griffiths who wrote not simply from the study of the Hindu scriptures but from the authenticity of their own life which combined their Christian faith with the Indian vision of spirituality they came in contact with. Several Indian authors and seekers also came forward and made their contributions to the making of an Indian Christian Spirituality. The protestant theologians Appasami, Chakkarai and Chenchiah deserve special mention here. Taking into consideration the christian prejudice against the non-christian

5 However they did not develop an indigenous liturgy of their own; or even if they had developed we have lost it. They also did not succeed in considering the lower caste people of India equal to them who were supposedly from a higher caste. Though this definitely is the lack of the operative power of Christian spirit in them, we have simultaneously to think it was a time when slavery was legally sanctioned in the western church and caste problem still remains in several sections of the Latin Church in India.

religions these contributions are to be praised as genuine and daring. The movement was later followed by several catholic authors and seekers that in the catholic church today the creation of a genuine Indian christian spirituality has become a real movement. This is especially strengthened by the ashram movement very powerful in the Indian catholic church today.

2. The characteristics of the classical approach

The classical approach is basically an approach based on scripture. It started with the study of all available Hindu scriptures. Since earlier studies in the Indian scriptures were in the field of sanskrit literature this approach was naturally centred on the then available sanskrit literature. The Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavadgita, classical sutras such as brahmasutra, bhaktisutra, yogasutra and various commentaries of each of them and similar religious writings of several Indian saints and sages provided a veritable background for such a study. Because of this initial Sanskrit accent in this approach, in later times a charge of "sanskritization" was levelled against this approach. This charge, though it carries some truth with it, cannot however be asserted without qualification. The bhakti movement which originated in the South and was later carried over to the North has much of its literature in regional languages and these writings, as they are imbued with genuine spirituality and Indianness, have greatly influenced the Indian authors and seekers in outlining their path of experiencing and expressing their Christian faith in an Indian way.

Since this approach had its starting point with Indian scriptures naturally it was attempted and continued by an elite group of Indian thinkers and spiritual seekers. A certain amount of intellectual quest was presupposed. This intellectuality, however, was not a mere rational understanding of the scriptures, as very often the Christian theological studies turned out to be, but a search for the spirit which in its process of realization demanded deep learning, discipline of mind and ability to reflect and realize the vision in one's own life.

Following the brahmanic way of realizing the Divine in one's own self this approach had an aspect of self-realization, namely the Divine is sought to be realized in one's own individual self rather than in the community around him. The idea is not the exclusion of the society and surroundings from one's own striving for self-realization, but the conviction that unless the person is divinely characterized the mission he is going to undertake will bear no fruit. However unless the seeker is not keen to deepen his spiritual realization applying it to the hard realities of life around him, this method of self-realization can turn out to be a kind of self-seeking lacking depth in search for and authenticity

of life. Yet it does not mean that every true seeker must be a social activist as we understand the term in contemporary liberation theology. There are different calls and different ways of realizing the calls as the Spirit does not guide every one in the same way or to the same goal. Realizing the self is not an easy task. It is a constant endeavour to silence one's own selfish cravings and to concentrate on God as the sole object of one's realization. It demands selflessness in all aspects of life and self-giving to every one around one. It was for such a realization of the Divine that the hermits of the ancient church went to the forest. It was with such an ideal in his mind young boy Benedict left home and took refuge in a cave of Mount *Subiaco*. It was the same kind of a search that made Francis leave home and started a new life in Portiuncula, as it were a new ashram in our Indian situation. The immediate goal of these Christian seekers was not the transformation of the society, nor did they leave home in order to found a society or to change the world. But all of them were followed by disciples and the initial challenge later became a powerful movement affecting the life of millions.

A movement of the spirit will certainly bring about a spiritual transformation of the world. The question is how the spirit works out this transformation. I think St. Benedict and St. Francis have greatly contributed to the transformation of the church and through church also the human society. Their method was a method of realizing the Divine, of course, as understood and experienced in the Christian tradition, in their own personal life and allow the radiance of this self-realization spread all over the world. In this process of extending the kingdom of God which they experienced within themselves to the farthest end of the world they set no limits. The disciples carried the movement to different parts of the world, and this is true of any genuine spiritual movement in the world in any religion and in any country. The spirit is always powerful and if it operates in one individual the result will be manifested in the surroundings. The world will be transformed.

3. The liberative approach to Christian spirituality

When a liberative approach is proposed in contrast to the classical approach it may falsely suggest the idea that the latter is not liberative. A fundamental work of the spirit working in a human person is to make him/her a free person. The spirit is always liberative. The question is about the manner in which the liberative force of the spirit is exercised. The classical approach described above is liberative just as the liberative approach shares with the classical the earnestness of its quest to be selfless and God-centred. We will come back to this question after treating the liberative approach.

4. The Characteristics of the liberative approach to spirituality

Unlike the classical approach this approach is not scripture-based. This is mainly because the people for whose liberation this approach to spirituality is developed is a people without a scripture of their own. The scriptures they own are the scripts they have in their brain, the sentiments they have in their blood, and the stories they have in their culture. This is what made some theologians say that the people are the word of God. The word of God is written in their heart and the first encounter with the word of God now takes the form of encounter with these people without a scripture. Since scripture points to the fact of education and ascertain type of an intellectual culture, the expression "without a scripture" also points to the lack of an alphabetic education and the actual exercise of a reflective intelligence as to develop a philosophical articulation of their own intimate and rich religious experience. The liberation theologians with the acumen of their reflective intelligence actually supply this. In doing this they are oppressed and marginalized.⁶

The liberative process that is envisaged in this trend of spirituality is directed to the freedom of the people whose hands are tied, whose voices are not heard and who now also live under structures of oppression. The focus of attention is therefore not on the liberation of the self, as in the traditional vedic spirituality, freeing the individual self, which is one's own self and not of others, from all desires of power and possessiveness. It is not because such a spiritual ideal is negated for the promoters of this spirituality, but the urgency of the situation demands that the spiritual person of today has to take into serious consideration the ongoing oppression of the people and raise his voice against it. The spirit works here in awakening the consciousness of a just and more acceptable moral order in the society. The promise of the spirit by Jesus contains the promise of an immediate and effective moral power in the heart. "He... will convict the world in respect of sin, and of righteousness and of judgement" (Jn. 16. 8). David Fyffe gives the following explanation:

The idea of "conviction" is complex. It involves the conception of authoritative examination, of unquestionable proof, of decisive judgement of punitive power. The result of the

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6. Samuel Rayan, "People's Theology", *Jeevadhara*, Vol. XXII No 129 (1992), pp. 175-292. This special issue on people's theology contains also the following articles on the topic: Asghar Ali Engineer, "People's Theology, an Islamic Point of View"; Corona Mary, "People's Theology, a Woman's Perspective"; George Koonthanam and Gabriele Dietrich, "Responses to Papers".

Holy Spirit's work will be to put believers in possession of clear moral ideals so that they must be seen and acknowledged as true. The real nature of sin, the necessity of righteousness, and the inevitability of judgement will be alike recognized. In other words the first effect of the spirit's illumination is a clear insight into the moral relation of the human action to the universe as that was conceived by Jesus. The conscience is at once enhanced in value and becomes more authoritative of the Holy Spirit.⁷

The spirit is operative not only in the confinement of one's own self but also in the world. The world has to change in shaping the new world of the kingdom of God. That is why the prophets criticised the rulers of the people and the false religious observances of the people as well. Jesus criticised the religious leaders of his time who stood in the way of the working of the spirit. This is certainly part of an authentic spiritual life; the manner and modality of which cannot however be dictated by another. The wind blows as it likes and the spirit functions in a human consciousness as it is appropriate to that person and to the circumstances he lives in.

In the liberative spirituality because it is sharply focussed on the transformation of the world action programmes become very important. Praxis has always been a reliable test of authentic spirituality. To the young rich man who asked Jesus about the way to gain eternal life Jesus proposed an action programme: "sell all you have and give the money to the poor and you will have riches in heaven; then come and follow me" (Lk. 18. 22). Similarly to the young lawyer who enquired about the neighbour Jesus told the parable of the good samaritan with this injunction: "Go and do likewise" (Lk. 10:37). Faith without action is futile (James 2:17). Hence action programme is not something new in the tradition of true Christian spirituality. What is new here is that action is specifically directed to the liberation of the poor and the marginalized. This is done not only through prayer and other spiritual programmes but also by a life-long struggle for justice and equality which is denied to them since centuries. Hence these action programmes invite confrontations and often confrontation with those who are in the upper strata of the society. This was very clear in the fishermen's struggle in Kerala.

Liberative spirituality has brought an array of social activists to the forefront of theological thinking and reflection. This is certainly a welcome event. Undoubtedly our church in india needs more and more such people. Since Karl Marx has outlined a masterly way of liberative struggles, the Marxian influence in liberative spirituality is quite often visible. However the liberation

7. *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, op. cit. p. 808

spiritualists maintain that their struggle draws inspiration from the Gospel.

5. The Classical versus the Liberative: attempt at a synthesis

The classical and the liberative are two approaches of realizing the Spirit in our own life as the accents in the process of realization are different. I am of opinion that they are complementary and the church should be rich in both. Liberation is the key word in both types of spirituality. The ideal of *moksha* as understood in the Indian classical tradition is certainly liberative. The liberation of a person (the individual self) from all bondage of attachment is the great ideal set before one's life. This is certainly a great ideal and worth striving for. The *Bagavadgita* presents the ideal human as *sthitaprajna* who is endowed with a steadied consciousness (2:54-56), who has stripped himself of the passion of attachment, fear and anger (*vita-raga-bhaya-krodha*) (2. 66, 4. 10).

He whose mind is not perturbed by adversity, who does not crave for happiness, who is free from passion, fear and anger, is the sage of constant wisdom (*Gita*, 2. 56).

Is this not an ideal for the liberative spiritualist? He should certainly have courage to face the adversities of life, he should not be always craving for his own pleasures and happiness but for the liberation of the poor and the oppressed, and he should not be a prey to his own petty desires or to passionate anger. In other words he should be free. Like Daniel before King Darius he should stand on the threshold of transcendence, free from all cravings and courageous to spell out what is wrong with the rulers and with the society that is ruled. The power of transcendence is really the great *moksha* ideal set before us by the classical vedic spirituality.

He who is unattached everywhere, who is not delighted at receiving good or dejected by the approach of evil, is poised in wisdom (*Gita*, 2. 57).

The liberation activist certainly has to encounter moments of success and failure and he should not lose himself in either. The *Bhagavadgita* is proposing a spirituality for such persons and this spirituality is founded on the activist's rootedness in the experience of God.

The yogi having controlled them all (the craving of the senses), sits focussed on me as the supreme goal. His wisdom is constant whose senses are under subjugation (*Gita*, 2. 61).

A steady stand founded on the experience of God and not disturbed by petty desires of the senses or other similar gains is what is proposed by the *Gita* and this is necessary for any

freedom fighter. This does not however mean that the freedom fighter should learn it from the *Gita* itself. He may learn it from any spiritual tradition.

When the struggle for the Indian independence was on the move it was Bal Gangadhar Tilak who convinced the devout Hindu minds that such a struggle for fight is in tune with the *Gita* spirituality provided it is done with the spirit of *nishkamakarma* (selfless action). His masterly work *The Gitarahasya* was a profound study of the *Gita* in order to animate the nation for its struggle for liberation and it had its effect in due time.

On the other hand the oppressive structures that depersonalize millions of our people are the result of undue assertion of the Ego of a few. They use, exploit or even exterminate others for boosting their own ego and they build up structures that their ego be permanently established. In the classical Indian thought the root cause of all evil is ego-consciousness, the *ahamkara*. True Indian spirituality demands the eradication of this Ego. So it is our duty to delve deep into the classical Indian thought and show to the Hindu intelligentsia that the oppressive structures this nation has built is against the main teachings of our own scriptures. Mahatma Gandhi used the same method when he criticized the discrimination against the coloured Asians in South Africa and later in India. The movement becomes successfully vibrant only when several members from the main community begin to pick up the insight and move to action.

The new liberation theology is actually a new interpretation of the biblical vision of life proposed against the hard realities of life in a so-called Christian country. This new awakening is forced by a situation. With the Gospel in their hands the Christians from the West indulged in colonial aggression, authorized slave trade and massacre of the prime settlers of the continents they invaded. They also developed an economic structure which ventures to keep the third world countries ever dependent on the developed nations. Then came this new reading into the teachings of the Bible from the Latin American countries and consequently a movement called the Theology of Liberation was set in the church. A similar venture should take place in the Indian main stream of spirituality. As it was the Marxian influence that set this movement in motion in Latin America so it can very well be that the Christian influence set such a movement in motion in India. Christianity has to learn a lot from many of the Indian traditions; but at the same time it has also to give to India quite a lot. The Christian concern for the poor and the oppressed, its contemporary readiness to side with the marginalized is certainly one of such great contributions the church makes to India. This should lead us to a deeper understanding and interpretation of the Indian classical tradition itself and that should in course of

time awaken the consciousness of the heralds of that spiritual tradition.

Conclusion

Swami Siddhananda⁸ is a young father who lives in a small hut which was the hut of a slave. He gets up at 4 a. m., spends a lot of time in prayer and meditation. He also reads and reflects a lot and develops his own critical consciousness of Christian spirituality.

I know him personally and I have deep esteem for him. To me he is a man who has conquered his passions, liberated from the cravings of senses, from fear and anger. When I met him in his ashram I remembered the Gita verse quoted above: *vita-raga-bhaya-krodha*. But on Christmas day he had an action programme, the outward expression of what he was daily struggling for. The harijans of the place were not allowed to have tea from the tea-shops nor can they get their hair cut in any of the barber shops in the town. Swami Siddhananda organized a protest march of the Harijans on the Christmas day. This was a silent march with their demands written and held in their hands. As the march reached the central street in the village a top leader of the place, a businessman, confronted him, insulted him and threatened him saying: "If you continue this way your body will be cut into pieces and hanged in the town". Most of the harijans fled, because they were afraid. The Swami however stood as if nothing has happened, with a great serenity of mind which once again reminds us of the *sthitaprajna* of the Gita. After the confrontation Swami was left free and he went home. But every day he made his usual walk through the town with the same serenity and smile on his face. He became the subject of the talk of the village people, especially of those who had witnessed the event. After a few days the business man who confronted him came forward and said: "Swami, I want to speak to you." Swami agreed. They moved to a nearby house. As soon as they reached there this man knelt before the swami, begged pardon. He said: "The way you reacted was marvelous. It moved me to think and I realize now that I am wrong. Now tell me what I should do. I will take up this cause, see that these two legitimate demands are met as soon as possible." Swami congratulated him for his courage to change his mind and readiness to face the refusing villagers. Once the leader was ready to change the demands were met soon. It is not necessary that every spiritual man working for the liberation of the oppressed is to go the way the swami has done. But it is important to remember that the ultimate aim should be a change of heart both in the oppressor and in the oppressed.

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8 I have deliberately changed the name of this swami because I do not know whether the swami will agree to reveal his identity.

Restructuring of Theological Education in India

The Task of Theological Colleges and Faculties

The author critically examines the theological education imparted in our Seminaries and Theological Faculties. Do we prepare the students for defending the dogmas and teachings of the Magisterium, or for ministering the Word of God which constantly challenges us? Theological education needs today an inter-religious key and an emphasis on experience. An authentic teacher is one who shares his experience, and not one who passes some information. The author also raises the question of methodology.

Vatican II document on Priestly Formation, *Optatum totius*, clearly affirmed the main scope of seminaries as preparing students for "the ministry of the word... growing in their understanding of God's revealed word". It also emphasized the need for "a more adequate understanding of the Churches and ecclesial communities separated from the Roman See" and "a knowledge of other religions which are more widely spread through individual areas". Of course, Vatican's outlook on ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue was rather condescending and less than generous. Still, its vision of theological education was a radical departure from the centuries old tradition, initiated by the Lateran Council IV and completed by the Council of Trent. Facing the challenge of Western political powers against the Church, Pope Innocent III and Lateran Council IV put all their effort in presenting the Church as a perfect society equal to the State, nay even superior to it, wielding a spiritual sword above the temporal sword of the State. Priests became the official spokesmen for this perfect spiritual society competing with the temporal powers for the total allegiance of the same people. This naturally shifted the focus of priesthood from mystery and ministry to "power" and administration; power over the physical Body of Christ to change bread and wine into Christ's Body and Blood and authority to control the people, the mystical body of Christ. They also affirmed the obligation of all Christians to submit all their sins, according to their species and number, to the power of the priesthood. Council of Trent radically reorganized priestly seminaries with a view to forming priests into competent judges

presiding over discerning and appropriately punishing the sins of the people. Thus it developed the moral side of theology into some kind of spiritual arm of the Church's legal system: Theology was essentially pastoral administration. Even Protestants like Emmanuel Kant and Schleiermacher advocated the inclusion of theology in the university curriculum as a programme of practical training alongside of medicine and law as services rendered to the people. Theology consisted of four main branches, church history, Sacred Scripture, Moral Theology and Theology proper. Of these, church history gradually adopted the method of secular history and became its branch. Bible took over the style of literary criticism; Morals was reduced to casuistry. Theology proper was itself isolated from the rest as a concerted defense of the actual teachings of ecclesiastical Magisterium through the help of Scholastic philosophy, and with Scriptural texts often taken out of context. It was reversing this whole historical trend of several centuries, that Vatican II reaffirmed the scope and focus of theological education as the transmission and illumination of divine Revelation.

1. The present condition of theological schools

As Bishop Alexander Carter has stated in his introductory article to *Optatum Totius* in the Abbott edition of the documents of Vatican II, the highly centralized control of Rome over seminaries and Catholic universities, put in place some four hundred years ago in view of the special circumstances of the Counter Reformation, was in the past the greatest obstacle to the free and responsible working of theological schools. Even in the post-Vatican era this Roman control over theological schools has in no way lessened, but rather only increased, apparently in order to counteract the move towards de-Romanising the church initiated by the Council. The repeated insistence of the Council to adapt theology to the local situation and to learn from modern sociology, psychology and methods of communication has mostly been ignored by the theological schools.

In fact, even today, the main concerns and issues of Indian Catholic theological schools are clearly in the area of their ongoing dialogue with the Roman authorities, than concerning their mission to make the Christian message intelligible and relevant to the Indian people. Roman curial authorities looking far away naturally find a certain opposition between the forthright proclaiming of the Gospel and the entering into dialogue with other religions between mission and social work, between Jesus present in the suffering and life-experience of the people and the official Christology. These were the principal points of discussion in a seminar of bishops and theologians held last August in Bangalore. Obviously these are phony issues, in which the Indian people can find little interest: One cannot communicate the message

of salvation without dialoguing with the recipients regarding the faith they have already received from God; Jesus of past history and dogma can be understood only through Jesus who is today and for ever. In India fighting the poverty of the people can only be from their deepest religious experience.

2. Theology in an interreligious key

One of the first steps in the development of Dharmaram was the starting of the Centre for the Study of World Religions. The center also began the publication of an official organ, the *Journal of Dharma*, a collaborative effort with several other academic institutions including the Sri Aurobindo Research Academy, Pondicherry, and the department of religious studies of Lancaster University. These were intended to create an appropriate inter-religious context in which the critical reflexion on faith in India should evolve. The great scandal in the religious history of India was the religious wars that pitted groups and communities against one another. This is rather ironic since an understanding of the One-without-a-second from which all things emerge and to which all strive to return should be the unifying and harmonizing principle for all thinking people. The different religious traditions that sprang up at crucial moments in history in response to actual human problems and have survived the test of centuries should be expected to have the energies to provide not only a unified vision of the human family but also the empowerment to follow that vision. In fact, all major faiths in different ways declare that human life can best be lived when one moves away from self-centredness and becomes Reality-centred. As Emperor Asoka declared in his Rock edicts VII and XII a religion gains prestige and credibility when it shows respect for other faiths than when it attacks and maligns them. Other-centred life constitutes the best way of promoting one's own individual life.

But unfortunately the historical record has been and still continues to be that religion is one of the most divisive factors among human beings. Many reasons are alleged for this paradoxical behaviour of religions: Often religion unwittingly becomes an ideological tool in the hands of the ruling classes. As Ewert Cousins argues, at the beginning of religions in the first axial period of world history (600-200 B. C.) the main focus was vertical, man's understanding of God, and only in this second axial period in which we live did their concerns become more horizontal dealing with the relationship of human beings. In the opinion of Wilfred Cantwell Smith mutual ignorance is at the root of religious conflicts, since believers of different religions know each other, for the most part, only from the outside, like a fly seeing a goldfish from the outside of the fishbowl.

It is not, however, correct to treat the different religions as parallel paths to the one Truth. The analogies of many paths

leading to the same summit, and many rivers flowing into the same ocean, the stock answer of many Hindu leaders to the phenomenon of religious pluralism, is part of the problem than a solution. Today no religion is claiming that it alone is true and every other false; yet every one of them pretends that it is superior to others, its understanding of Truth. Naturally the other's knowledge of God has something missing in it. If different religions are conceived as different rivers flowing into the same ocean, one's own religion is seen as the great Amazon, while others are tiny Tibers! But equally unacceptable is the proposal, which comes from the secularised atmosphere of the West, where the church has to be blamed for all human problems. The proposed answer is to forget the religious chasms, which can never be bridged, and to derive motivation from a shared concern for peace and this worldly liberation for a first stage of cooperation among Hindus, Buddhists, Jews, Muslims and Christians on the material plane, and only as a second step "reflect and talk together about their religious convictions and motivations" (See Paul F. Knitter, *Journal of Dharma* 17 (1992) 282-297). But as one Sumitra Shah wrote to the Editor of the *New York Times* (March 13, 1993 p. A 20) it is precisely this consumerist culture, which ascribes priority to economic issues neglecting the Indian "traditional values of communitarianism, catholicism and common decency" that drives some people irrationally backward to religious fundamentalism and fanaticism. India can solve its material and social problems only through the religious path, not in any other way.

Perhaps the best answer to the problem of religious pluralism was indicated by the Vedic writer who said: "That one Real, wisemen speak of in different ways", and "That which is one poets imagine in diverse forms". This means not that there are different ways to attain the same Truth, but that the Truth once realized is being expressed in different ways. The point is that only from the ineffable experience of the Transcendent, immanent in the heart of every being, do religions and wisemen derive their differing explanations to respond to concrete historical situations and needs of individuals and communities. Faith is the gift of God shared by all God's children inspired and guided from within themselves by the indwelling divine Spirit, to whatever religion they belong. Diversity comes only from making that experience expressed in the specific cultural situation.

Inner experience of faith remains ineffective and irrelevant to life unless it is translated into the different coordinates of human existence. It is here that the distinct contributions of different religions become clear. One religion may focus attention on one aspect of human life without explicitly denying others, while another may emphasize another aspect. For Siddhartha Gautama Buddha living in a situation of controversy among various

religions and sects, all metaphysical questions about the existence of God and the immortality of the soul were irrelevant to human liberation from the present condition of ignorance and suffering, and there was no unanimous solution to those problems any way. So for him the purpose of religion was human liberation through psychological realization of the present condition. The early Hindu rishis living in the peace of the forest, away from the rat-race of the towns focussed their attention on the three roots of human suffering, the material conditions, supernal beings and inner psychological conflicts. Answer to these they found in a transcendental pole of the spirit, the One-without-a-second immutable consciousness, the really Real, from which all things emerge and into which they all return. The Judeo-Christian and Islamic traditions which had their origin in the wandering life of the people of the Middle East, found their focus of attention in the historical reality of human existence: Human history had to find a *kairos*, a decisive moment of its definitive return to its creative source, God. For Judaism this decisive moment will be the future advent of the Messiah, for Christianity it is the advent already realized of the Son of God, in Jesus Christ, while Islam found this decisive event in the revelation of Qur'an to Mohammed. Even Buddhism found the decisive historical moment of human liberation in the illumination of Buddha who set the wheel of Dharma in motion for all humanity. So the task of each religion is to communicate to humanity its unique insight and its relevance for all human beings.

3. Foster eastern rationality

Perhaps the most important point in the reorganization of theological schools is a critical examination of the methodology it is wedded to. Western Church got its identity when preachers of the Gospel left the Palestinian background of Jesus Christ and reincarnated the Christian message in the dominant Graeco-Roman culture of the times. They could do this only by accepting the main framework of Platonic philosophy which had such a firm grip on the Western mind that all who came after Plato are said to have written only footnotes to his great treatises. For Christian preachers it was actually accepting Plato's theory of forms with the Good, the form of all forms at the top, participated by all beings through intermediary ideas. The post-apostolic thinkers as represented by even later authors of the New Testament books attempted to incorporate the Christian salvation scheme into Platonic mediation structure and instate Jesus Christ as a sort of Platonic mediator. They argued that the one true mediator between God and human beings had to be equal to both poles of the mediation and that Jesus Christ had to be truly God and truly man. This objective analytical approach to the divine reality as the supreme Good, the Sun of the moral universe in the

style of Platonism was complemented by Aristotelian teleology. For Aristotle every piece of knowledge was *phronesis*, practical wisdom, for organizing life towards the attainment of its ultimate goal. This goal was in the exercise of the highest faculty of man, his intellect, through contemplation. This wisdom was shared by practitioners of philosophy through discourse, a communicative praxis.

Though a good part of the Hebrew idea of fidelity to God's covenant through the faithful observance of the law was saved in the Platonic-Aristotelian synthesis, something very important was somewhat lost in the shift in method. It is the experiential element which was central to the Hebrew understanding of the divine *Shekinah* and the whole Oriental sense of the divine indwelling in the heart of every being. This is clear in the theology of faith. The whole Hebrew understanding of faith is summarised in the Epistle to the Hebrews, as the substance of things we hope for (Heb. 11:1). We have already the first fruits of the Spirit and the Spirit is present in all, and is praying in and through them (Rom 8:23-25). Those who have faith are already citizens of heaven (Phil. 3:20). God has given us the Spirit as the first instalment of our heavenly life (2 Cor 5:5). Yet in the Western communicative praxis faith is reduced to mere acceptance of truths revealed by God and God's revelation itself as official communication of certain truths regarding God and human salvation, otherwise unavailable to the human mind. Faith was thought of as the human response to God, very much a moral virtue, than the content of the divine experience, which different religions try to interpret. Thus interreligious dialogue itself lost its relevance since different religions were various paths of unequal value for reaching the divine summit.

Theology itself was reduced to dogma, the bunch of truths derived from divine revelation. Naturally the theological school became an impersonal institution, dispensing this special information, and people go to it as to a kind of supermarket to buy the special type of knowledge, pass the specified examinations and get certain academic degrees. In this perspective teachers are judged solely by their talent in communication, how effectively they can deliver their information. In the noble traditions of history, especially of India, however, any academic institution is a community of teachers and students. The teachers pool their expertise and experience and continue to work together for the advance of the sciences they specialize in. The students gain more by personal contact and conversation with them than by formal lectures. If a student avoids a good scholar solely because his style of lecturing is not effective, he is himself to blame if he fails to profit by the presence and availability of an experienced scholar, who can communicate some of his enthusiasm for his favourite subject.

Imbibing wisdom from the man of experience is central to obtaining knowledge about faith. So lectures in theological subjects have an important place in theological education. There is, however, all over the world widespread complaints against the lecture method of teaching, and there is no doubt that it has to be supplemented by other methods. The only way to correct the supermarket appearance of the theological schools is to bring back the centrality of experience. The case study method, field work for gathering material for scientific analysis, and applying projected theories, interviewing specialists on a given topic, and other such methods are commonly used today to correct the inadequacy of the lecture. But here the most important factor is the approach and attitude of the student. First of all interest in a subject will not come automatically simply because it is prescribed; it has to be created by the one who has to learn it. One has to prepare for it listening to the lecture by reading up the assigned material and checking one's own prior information about it. At the end of the lecture one should summarise in a sentence or two the new information gained and critically evaluate the material supplied by the lecturer.

The material supplied in a lecture covers only a small portion of the information we need to gain an adequate knowledge of the subject. For this looking up relevant material in the library, especially in articles appearing in various reviews and journals is extremely important. If these are not indicated by the lecturer, one has to find them by oneself.

It is simplistic to imagine that our academic formation will be completed by simply attending to the material assigned in lectures and projects. There is a vast amount of material that has to be searched and acquired by the collective effort of teachers and students. For these they have to form clubs and seminar groups to meet regularly and pool their information.

Conclusion

The important question in the reorientation of theological schools is what the academic community is going to contribute to our nation. Is it merely training a few more priests and sisters in philosophy and theology? Today the question is how we can change the academic system of the country and of the world. The whole Indian national educational system is to a great extent examination oriented, for securing a degree and getting a job. The educational system in the world as a whole is again, to a great extent instrumentalist, seeking advance of science and technology, in order to increase the material comforts of humans, exploiting the natural resources. Even philosophy and theology are instrumentalist in scope, calculated principally to form an intellectual elite to serve our various institutions and

to provide leadership to the people in their efforts to create a brighter future. No one can deny that these goals of education are still important, and this orientation creates a certain spirit of emulation among our schools, colleges and universities.

But we should not forget the genius of the nation which always emphasized another type of rationality. It proceeds not with groping for a wisdom which is not yet attained, but with the realization that what one is looking for is already present. The Indian sages stated that true wisdom is to realize the presence of the one source of all wisdom in the cave of one's own heart, as the Self of one's own self, and to translate that experience into the various coordinates of human existence, psychological, social, moral and spiritual. The four *puruṣārthas*, wealth, pleasure, righteousness and final liberation indicate four ways of translating the inner experience into concentric circles surrounding one's inner, authentic Self. The four *aśramas* of studentship, state of the householder, stage of sojourn in the forest of retirement, and the final station of the *sannyasin* express in another way how the divine wisdom present within is actualized in the different conditions of one's own psychological growth. Similarly the four castes have the same explanatory scope. The *sudra* who works with his body, the *vaiśya* using his mind, the *kṣatriya* using his intelligence and political wisdom, and the *Brahmin* standing for spiritual realization show that, for the inner wisdom to be meaningful for human society should find actualization in the various classes of our political society.

If our society should get out of the present quagmire of the economic rat-race, corruption which is apparent at all levels and spheres of our public life, and the constant rivalries and infighting of political parties, the non-instrumentalist rationality which is the noble heritage of our nation, should animate our educational system. The school should appear a true fellowship of teachers and students, working together to translate the inner wisdom into psychological and social expressions. Though we may be dealing with secular subjects in our curriculum, our overall aim is overtly sacral. So we have to endeavour to achieve a real encounter between the secular and the sacred, and to discern the eternal in the temporal, leaving aside all selfish interest in the immediate material gain. In this way we will be able to devote all our energy to achieve academic excellence in all fields of education.

Traditional Theology and People's Theology: Task and Prospects

One of the important tasks before the Indian Churches is to promote People's Theologies vis-a-vis traditional theologies. Traditional theologies are more dogmatic, deductive, speculative, conceptual, logical and abstract, coming from upper classes of people. People's theologies have their source and starting point in people's experience and praxis of faith, their struggles, pain, sufferings, aspirations, dreams and hopes, expressed in their stories, folklores, myths, poems and narrations. People discern and interpret the liberating Word of God present and active in their own lives and history, and they interpret the Scriptures and traditions from the actual context of their lives. People's theologies are not to be seen as a threat, but as a challenge and an opportunity for a radical revision of traditional theologies.

On the occasion of the 20th anniversary of *Jeevadhara*, a seminar on "People's Theology" was held in June, 1991 at the Theology Centre, Kottayam. It was a theologically significant event. It brought together persons involved in people's movements and theologians in order to reflect on the theology that emerges from people's lives. This seminar briefly described the nature of people's theology, discussed the method involved therein and deliberated on its implications for praxis. In this article I intend to indicate briefly the task before traditional theology and people's theology and prospects for both. In part I, I discuss briefly the traditional theology and point out the challenge it faces vis-à-vis People's theology. In part II, I try to reflect on the identity and sources of people's theology, its specific method and in part III, I offer some tentative reflections on the task before people's theology and prospects for its growth and maturation.

I

Traditional Theology, mostly a product of medieval scholasticism focuses on dogmatic theology which develops and articulates the understanding of the deposit of faith as doctrines originating from the councils and papal magisterium.

Thomas Aquinas set a pattern of theology that came to be recognized by the magisterium as the safest and most appropriate theology for the church. It concentrated on the development of sacred doctrine and elaborated the sacred science of theology with the help of Aristotelian philosophy. Philosophy of hellenistic provenance was considered the handmaid of theology. Theology thus elaborated was principally dogmatic theology. Its method was deductive, abstract and speculative. Its main attention was on scientific explanation of doctrine in conformity with reason. Scriptural texts were used for confirmation of the doctrine explained. This mainline theology was taught in seminaries whether in Europe or in Africa, in Latin America or in Asia. This tradition of theology is still the one taught in our seminaries today though some peripheral changes have taken place. In the post-Vatican period during which I did my theology, our professors who were good thomists would add a scholion on ecumenical positions of doctrine and a skeletal often inconsequential note on other religions. Moral theology rooted in philosophical ethics was hardly touched by the deeply spiritual insights of biblical ethics. Its pastoral applications dealt mostly with problems of conscience of individuals without any awareness of structural dimensions of evil and sin.

The traditional theology which was mainly dogmatic theology used scripture and tradition as sources, former playing only a secondary role of confirmation of doctrine. This theology was mostly propositional in nature and was known for its clarity and logical coherence. For pastoral life and ministry, the pastors trained in such a theology were expected to apply it to concrete situations. It was a theology from above meant to filter down to the grass-roots of the Christian community. Such a theology deductive in method and propositional in nature was divorced from the biblical story of God's revelation, i. e., God's self-communication to people in history. It was a theology in itself and for itself. Biblical revelation of God's redemptive love for His people did not feed and nourish theology. With biblical renewal, scripture as the primary source and a contextualising hermeneutic have come to be accepted. Yet one must confess the method of theology still remains deductive and speculative unattentive or less attentive to another significant source, namely God's living and saving presence and His spirit in the community of faith, and in the history, culture, struggles, pains and yearnings of people for freedom, dignity, meaning, fellowship and wholeness of life. Such a state of traditional theology reflects a deeper malaise, i. e., alienation of theology and theologians from the people, the latter's struggles for survival, their sufferings, their culture and history. In the church, seminaries have been the main centres of traditional theology. Theology teachers mostly

trained in the universities of the West communicated this theology to the seminarians within a hot house atmosphere of the seminaries without any impact of contextual realities of the country on method and content. With few exceptions, most theology teachers comfortable with the method developed in the West hardly made any attempt in rethinking theology in relation to the context, much less in relation to people's lives, struggles, sufferings, their culture and history. For example, the pervasive reality of caste, the anti-human practice of untouchability, the reality of exploited tribals who had their own culture and world-views, the cultural oppression of women in all areas of social life, the children workers coming mostly from poor dalit community etc. hardly figured in the theological curriculum and faith reflection. There are a few instances of seminaries and faculties that have taken initiatives to contextualise theological formation in the history, culture and struggles of people's lives, especially the marginalized ones¹. If theology is not rooted in people's lives, is it because our seminaries and theology teachers are alienated from people? Surprisingly, alienation continues to mark our seminaries and theologians, which in turn may be a symptom of the alienation of the Church in India as a whole. Traditional theology has to go through a conversion from alienation to inculturation understood in liberative sense. It also means that theologians will have to undergo a deeper conversion from alienation to solidarity with and participation in people's lives, culture and sufferings, especially the powerless people of our society and country². It is in this context that emerging people's theologies become significant, relevant and challenging.

People's theology with its new starting point and focus on people's praxis of faith, their struggles, sufferings and their stories of hopes will be marked as a new way of doing theology. It will have profound and disturbing implications for traditional theology for its transformation. People's theology will be related to scripture and tradition in a new way. In the new method of people's theology, scripture will be appropriated through a re-reading of it by people, and tradition will be discerningly re-interpreted and integrated into a dynamic and context-related praxis of faith by people.

1 I have in mind a few regional theology centres in some parts of the country which have been experimenting with contextual theology. Genuine and serious attempts are being made to live close to people and do theology with people's resources. They are signs of hope for people's theology and they need to be supported and strengthened in its people-centred theological formation.

2 Cf. George Soares-Prabhu "From Alienation to Inculturation" in *Bread and Breath* ed. T. K. John, G. S. P. Anand, 1991, pp. 55-99.

In the church, emergence of people's theologies and the rethinking of traditional theology will be complementary. Traditional theology has a task of rethinking its method and content for its transformation and the emerging people's theologies need to be recognised and nurtured as constructive expressions of oppressed people becoming a people and subjects of their own history. The prospects of people's theologies need to be articulated and supported. In the second part, I would like to reflect briefly on identity and the sources of people's theologies and their method.

II

People's Theology: Its Dynamic Identity and Purpose

The awakened consciousness of oppressed people is the most important factor for the emergence of people's theology. It is an expression of the yearnings of oppressed people to become a people and it belongs to the burgeoning of peoplehood. Its locus is people's lives, their struggles, their culture, their yearnings. All oppressed peoples long for freedom, justice, life, dignity and solidarity. In a divided world, the oppressed are considered a non-people. Only through their becoming a people, peoplehood of all can become a historical reality. In the Bible, the situation of an oppressed people becomes the locus of God's liberative and redemptive action. God's liberating deed fulfils the longings of the oppressed and enslaved people to become free people and God's people. People's theology comes under this.

In People's theology which is organically located in people's lives, and their ongoing history of their struggle for peoplehood, the fundamental value category is people which is not just a demographic or sociological label. The dignity of human person and the dignity of people are fundamental values. People's theology belongs to the dynamic process of a non-people gaining dignity as a people. Hence people's theology is not an abstract ahistorical theology. Arising as it does from the womb of people's lived faith, hopes, sufferings and struggles, their culture and history, it articulates the hidden depths of meaning and values of the liberative process of people becoming free and whole and supports and strengthens this process. It points to the spiritual resources latent in people's lives and history, celebrates their hopes and vision of new life. If such is the dynamic identity and purpose of people's theology, it can come to birth and mature only if it is implanted in the womb of people's lives and history. There can be no test-tube people's theology alienated from the womb of people's lives.

Sources of people's theology and its method

People's theology has its starting point and locus in people's

lives, their lived faith, their struggles, pains, hopes, their culture, their myths and stories. The emerging people's theologies such as dalit theology, tribal theology, women's theology have their starting point and source in awakened dalits, tribals and women who struggle for freedom, dignity and peoplehood. It is doing theology with peoples' resources. In part I, I pointed out that traditional theology uses tradition and scripture as its main sources and elaborates dogmatic or systematic theology with the help of philosophy of hellenistic origin. It largely ignored the significant source of people's lived faith and their history. People's theology does not ignore these sources. But it brings a new way of reading these sources from the vantage point of people's lives. It starts from the specifically new source of theology, namely the complex whole of people's lives, their struggles, pain, hopes, their culture, their stories. In this source, the focus is on the history of the powerless and oppressed people, struggling for dignity and peoplehood³.

In people's theology, people are the primary subjects and artisans of theology. Theologians and others committed to people's emergence and their liberation can and should contribute to the development of people's theology. At the same time all those who are committed to people's cause and to the emergence of people's theology have to develop a sensitive listening capacity to people's stories of struggles, suffering, oppressions, stories and experiences of hopes and failure, their poems, proverbs and their multiple and varied expressions. Solidarity with people sensitises us to the stories of victims of violence, oppression, brutal stories of rape of women, humiliation of dalits by high caste, stories of exploitation of the powerless tribals by contractors, moneylenders and corrupt officials, the stories of agonized and impoverished "refugees" of megadams and industries of our country, the stories of greedy and inhuman exploitation of child labour in Varanasi, Moradabad and Sivakasi, the never ending stories of the powerless people whose dignity and peoplehood is trampled upon everywhere in our country. The cry of broken people and their shouts of righteous anger, all these stories are the source of people's theology⁴. We may use human sciences to understand them but we must see them first and foremost as

3 'Minjung theology' as a theological movement in Korea is a people's theology from which people's theology in India can learn meaningful perspectives and insights. Minjung are the oppressed suffering people. Cf. *Minjung Theology: People as the subjects of History* by Kim Yong-Bok, New York, Orbis Books, 1983.

4 Cf. Samuel Rayan, "People's Theology" in *Jeevadhara* vol. 22 (1992) pp. 175-202 on the importance of stories of people's lives and struggles for people's theology.

the locus of God's incarnate word. They are a theological reality. People's theology draws upon these sources, discerns and interprets the liberating word of God present and active in people's lives and history. This precious source of people's theology is accessible to all those who in solidarity participate in the grime and dirt of people's lives. In the task of people's theology, theologians become co-theologians with people and are continually challenged to deeper solidarity with them.

People's theology is a new way of doing theology with people's resources for their liberation and well-being. It is doing theology with them and on their behalf. People's theology starting from stories of oppressed people, their sufferings, struggles and yearnings will be a theology of stories and narration⁵. People's lives, history, culture come to us as stories. Their struggle, sufferings and hope, find expression in telling stories, proverbs, myths and songs they sing. They need retelling, interpretation and articulation.

People's theology marks a shift from heavily conceptual and speculative method of traditional theology to a symbolic and narrative style. Its emphasis changes from *logos* to *mythos*. In people's theology, conceptual framework will be less prominent but not absent. People's theology as one of stories and narration will complement traditional theology which is also undergoing revision and rethinking.

The challenge of conversion from alienation to solidarity

Alienation is the biggest obstacle to the emergence of people's theology. The church even after post-Vatican renewal reflects alienation from people in many aspects. The birth-pangs of a new church are yet with us. Signs of conversion from alienation to solidarity are seen in many action groups, people's movements and committed lay persons, religious and priests. Yet these signs are few and far between. Theologians in many of our theological institutions feel confident and at home with the method and content of traditional theology and quite ill at-ease with the new sources of people's theology and the different method it implies. Deeply entrenched in the categories of speculative theology, many of them find themselves bowled over by the new sources and method of people's theology. I think that most of us, including myself, are not fully converted from our alienation from people to solidarity with and commitment to them. Theology is reflection on God's redemptive word and deed in the history of people. It calls for discernment of God's grace

5 Cf. Young-Chan Ro, "Symbol, Myth, and Ritual: The Method of Minjung" in *Lift Every Voice*, by Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite and Mary Potter Engd (Ed.). Harper San Francisco, 1990, p. 48.

and judgement at work in history. The Bible reveals to us a God who liberates people and who delights to dwell with them.

III

Tasks and Prospects of People's Theology

This brief essay as the title indicates is expected to view the tasks and prospects ahead for people's theology in the service of people's liberation.

Prospects concentrate on what people's theology can become, and tasks concern the concrete steps to be taken to promote and strengthen it. I mention here some of the prospects and tasks with brief comments on each of the points.

1. That people's theology belongs to the process of oppressed people becoming free and whole needs to be kept in view for relevance and authenticity. For the people's lived faith and their stories of struggles, joys, sufferings and hopes, their culture and world-views should be the starting point and source together with scripture and tradition re-read and re-interpreted. Listening to and gathering stories of people in its multiple and varied expressions should be one of the first points in the agenda of people's theology.

2. The specifically rich contribution of people's theology will be seen accordingly by development of mythos (hence symbolic theology) rather than logos as in the case of traditional theology. People's theology will be marked by a narrative style rich in stories and symbols.

3. People reading the Bible as their book and appropriating its faith meaning in the context of their own history will also shape a people's hermeneutics of the Bible. The Bible will be seen as a story of God's dealing with people. The horizon of the Bible and that of people meet and merge as one horizon of God meeting people. The sensitivities of people's struggle for meaning and dignity become important interpretative criteria of God's word and deed for liberation and redemption of people. This needs development.

4. For the development of people's theology, study of people's lived faith expressed in people's religiosity filled with life-rooted symbols and rituals is an important task. It needs to be done in a discerning and constructive way.

5. People's theology in our situation will be strongly culture-oriented without ignoring other aspects of people's life, i. e., socio-economic and political aspects in which people's lives are enmeshed. This will call for a deeper study of culture,

especially that of marginalised peoples of Indian society with special attention to the culture of silence of these communities. To achieve this, we will have to employ human sciences as sociology, anthropology and social psychology. This will help us to recover people's value and meaning systems and world-views, as significant sources of people's theology. Study of 'little traditions' will be a priority for the development of people's theologies. Speaking of the importance of cultural-orientation in people's theology, I see the need to revitalize cultural expression of people for the emergence of their subjectivity. As I mentioned earlier, it is necessary for a people subject to a culture of silence for centuries or millennia, like tribals or dalits to pass into a culture of self-direction and participation. In a society ruled by caste-hierarchy, dalits pass from a culture of silence to a culture of participation and become subjects of their own liberation and history by rejection of the ideology of hierarchical social order and its varied and subtle form of domination and hegemony. A similar process we can see with regard to tribals and women. It is a movement of counter-culture released by people's liberational struggles.

6. In India which is religiously and culturally pluralistic, people's theology will reflect this pluralism. This means that there will be not only a people's theology but people's theologies. Though there is a pluralism of people's socio-cultural and religious identities and experiences, there is a deep unity of genuine humanism and faith which needs to be retrieved for people's liberation and solidarity and social transformation. Behind this pluralism lies a wholeness of outlook on life and human relations and an incarnational quality of values and meanings. All this will help people's theology to support and strengthen people's solidarity and communion.

7. People's theology will also pose a healthy and constructive challenge to traditional theology to become context-sensitive and to acquire a truly valid universality of meaning for people's lives. This will call for drawing out the implications of such a theology for our understanding of the Triune God, Christ, Church, Sacraments, liturgy and moral theology. In my area of moral theology, I realise the urgent need to rethink the angle from which we do our ethical reflection. The perspective of the oppressed people brings a liberating approach to the study of human dignity, personal and social morality and moral norms. I have made a tentative attempt to reflect on the poor and dalits in the contextualisation of morals⁶.

6 Cf. S. Arokiasamy, "Sarvodaya through Antyodaya — The Liberation of the Poor in the Contextualisation of Morals" *Vidyajyoti* 51 (1987) pp. 555-564, cf. my paper also "Dalits in the Contextualisation of Morals" in a forthcoming book on *Dalit Theology* by ISPCK, Delhi.

8. There is need to articulate and strengthen the spirituality latent in people's lives, their stories of suffering and their religiosity. The biblical theology of the "anawim of Yahweh" and the normative paradigm of the story of Jesus will serve to articulate a people's spirituality.

9. People's theology as a new way of doing theology with people and their resources, stresses the transformation of theology without ignoring the transformative purpose of theology. People's theology in India will continue to have equal stress on social transformation as long as our society, its economics and politics are linked to the powerful elites and their culture of domination.

10. People's theology as a theology of transformation will be also theology of people's politics for liberation and wholeness. In a divided world of the powerful and the powerless, oppressed people becoming a people is an event of people's power and politics. People's theology will support and strengthen politics of people and politics of participation. It will call for a priority of political and social order that guarantees the participation of the powerless people in the political processes of decision making of the country. It will be the index of people-centred democracy⁷. The latter task will call for the development of the political meaning of faith and the Gospel⁸.

In the area of economics, people's theology will demand that powerless people become subjects of economic policies and arrangements. All economic theories, initiatives and decisions will be judged by what they do to guarantee justice to people and serve their needs, a Gandhian idea only remembered as a quote by politicians.

In real economic terms, the needs of the impoverished people will have priority over policies to fulfill the wants of the affluent⁹. People's economics will question the profit-oriented competitive capitalist market economy which is the currency of contemporary economics. People's theology has an important task to strengthen people-centred economy in which people matter first.

Concluding remarks

The future of people's theology rests with people. Awakened people as subjects of theology will shape its course

7 Cf. David Hollenbach, *Claims in Conflict*, Retrieving and Renewing the Catholic Human Rights Tradition, New York, Woodstock, Paulist Press, p. 1979, p. 204.

8 Cf. Koron Srisang (ed.), *Perspectives on Political Ethics*, WCC Publications Geneva, 1983, pp. 53-54,

9 Cf. D. Hollenbach, op. cit. p. 204.

and guard its relevance. All those who are committed to people's liberation and wholeness can join hands with them in solidarity and participation. Theologians will be challenged to place all their intellectual resources and expertise at the service of people and the project of their liberation. People's theology calls for a new intellectuality on the part of theologians and intellectuals committed to people's cause in support of the emergence of oppressed people into God-willed peoplehood.

In the church, people's theology will call for a new ecclesiology of people's communion. The basic Christian communities will open up to the communion of basic human communities. The charism of leadership in the church will be relearned and relived as a charism of service according to the Gospel paradigm of Jesus (Mk. 10:42-45; Jn. 13:1-17)¹⁰.

People's theology has broader frontiers that include all oppressed peoples and their struggles and extends its sweep towards solidarity of all peoples. It starts with concrete historical communities of the oppressed who have faces and names and who have a history but its value, meaning and goal transcend all narrow particularisms, be it ethnic, cultural, linguistic, national etc.

People's lived faith in struggles, sufferings and hopes is interpreted as embodiment of God's liberating grace. They are seen "suffused with God's will to human wholeness"¹¹. People's theology contextually and relevantly will belong to the emergence of people, their solidarity and their wholeness. Arising as it does from the womb of people's experiences, struggles, sufferings and yearnings, it will serve "to understand in depth the nature of the struggle, to see its affinity to ultimate realities and meanings, to sustain the hope of God's Reign on the Earth and to keep the combat human"¹². It will challenge traditional theology to the same purpose in keeping with the fundamental thrust of biblical faith.

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10 Cf. Alois Lorscheider, "The Redefined Role of the Bishop in a Poor, Religious People" in *The People of God Amidst the Poor*, ed. L. Boff and V. Elizonde, Concilium, T. T. Clark, Ltd, Edinburgh, 1984, pp. 47-49.

11 Samuel Rayan, "People's Theology" *Jeevadhara* vol. 22 (1992) p. 202.

12 *ibid.*

Option for the Poor and its Challenges to the Present: Ecclesial Structures and Praxis

Jesus' option for the poor has to be the guideline for the Churches who claim to follow Him. The author makes a strong critique against the imperial and bureaucratic structures and style of functioning of the Churches in India today. Essentially unchristian structures and praxis can never become Christian though they are supported by the tradition of centuries or millennia and sanctioned by the highest ecclesiastical authority. Only a deinstitutionalized and declericalized Church, freed from hierarchical imperialism, rite rivalries, caste antagonisms, dogmatic narrowmindedness, disciplinary straightjackets, and above all, from greed and cowardice, can become Christlike to be able to commit itself to the cause of the poor.

Option for the poor is a cliché of liberation theology, whether Latin American or Indian. There is no dearth of explanations for it, each writer purporting to give it a meaning that would suit the special brand of theology pursued by him or the post held and activity indulged in by him in the church or in the society at large. I do not want to plunge into the maze of this interpretational jugglery. Here option for the poor is understood as it was practised by Jesus Christ. Even this can open a floodgate of views and interpretations. The salient features of Jesus' option for the poor, as I see them from the Gospels, are therefore jotted down for the sake of clarity. Jesus sided with the poor not from the ivory tower of a seminary, spirituality centre, religious house, rectory, not even from his own house in Nazareth, but by identifying himself with the poor, exposing his life to all the insecurities, risks, threats, dangers, deprivations etc. which formed part and parcel of the life and existence of the poor of his day. He did it, not for pioneering, furthering or promoting the mission of any organisational entity he belonged to, nor out of mania or zeal or enthusiasm for experimenting something new in the religious history of Israel, but out of pure love which was flesh and blood, vibrantly human and genuinely divine. It was this love that brought him headlong into collision with the powers-that-be. He spoke against the temple, broke the sabbath rules, violated the social and religious taboos of his people, inveighed against the Jewish

authorities, unmasked the hypocrisy of many a religious practice and custom, not out of personal grudge or prejudice, not even out of any ideology, or as strategy in a programme of action, but out of love for the poor who were the victims of everything and everybody he spoke against and denounced. It may also be noted that Jesus did not idealize poverty, nor did he canonize the poor. Jesus did not proclaim the goodness of the poor, but the goodness of God, who let his kingdom open out exclusively to the poor. God loves the poor, not because they are holy, but because they are discriminated against. God loves the unloved! It was the living out of such an option for the poor in concrete words and deeds that brought upon Jesus the ignominy and tragedy of his crucifixion. Option for the poor was a highly dangerous thing in Jesus' case. In an unjust world in which the poor are victims of human greed and arrogance, option for the poor — if it is christian — will be a death-bringing affair.

A word about who really are the poor may be in order. In the days of Jesus it was comparatively easy to recognize and identify them. But today with so many fakirs and sadhus roaming all the holy and not so holy cities and towns of our country it is well nigh impossible to distinguish the truly poor from the brawny crooks. Many a mendicant seen at our stations and shrines own immense wealth. Those who have voluntarily chosen begging as a profession are certainly not the poor of Yahweh. The lazy brawns, the confirmed spendthrifts, the obdurate drunkards and the social parasites of all hues and castes are not to be mistaken for the poor of Jesus. Those who take the vow of poverty and automatically get catapulted into the higher echelons in the economic order, enjoying full financial security, living in mansions under the name of ashrams, rolling in wealth, possessing all the conveniences and amenities of modern life, are no doubt traitors to the evangelical counsels and hypocrites before God and his people, but never the poor of God or for God or his kingdom. The poor man is the one who has no helper (Ps 72, 12) and whose only helper therefore is God. They form the dregs of society. Theologians see God in them, political parties and social organizations fight for their rights, but when it comes to getting even a cup of cold water, they have no one and no where to turn to, because theologians are busy conducting and attending seminars to find out the real meaning of the concept of poverty, political parties are busy drawing up their manifestos for uplifting the downtrodden, social activists busy constructing centres for conscientizing the poor, sociologists busy writing out their theses on the root causes of poverty, and the religious busy conducting holy hours for the poor! It is the unfortunate ones — whose number passes millions in India — who are the poor of Jesus. A church that says she does not know how and where to meet them, does not have the sense, let alone the sensibility, of her founder.

Jesus opted for them, lived for them and therefore had to die for all, both for the poor and for their oppressors — for the poor so that they may have hope, for the oppressors and the rich so that they may be converted!

The Institution of the Church

The church is said to be the extension of Jesus Christ in history. If this church is to practise option for the poor, she has first to become Christlike. Is the Indian church christlike as regards her structures and praxis? To any one whose vision is not myopic owing to ecclesiastical indoctrination, the church in India appears as a big institution, with a monarchical, and hence unchristian structure, although there are many good and well-meaning individuals among the laity, religious and clergy and even among bishops. This church cannot make an option for the poor in the manner in which Jesus did it because she stands out in poor India as a big institution, owning wealth and wielding power¹. The colonial powers which brought christianity into India, not as a movement or charism, but as a fullfledged western institution, planted it here and patronized it for centuries, have changed quite a lot, but the church here still retains many of her colonial past and expansionist tendencies. Bolstering the institution of the church with more power and influence seems to be the main preoccupation of the church leaders. They do it by planting more educational institutions, hospitals and other training centres which give her more clout in society and politics. The assets thus accumulated bring her on a par with multi-national corporations. How can such a church speak of herself as the church of the poor and for the poor? The life-style of the bishops, religious and priests, exhibiting so much opulence, gives the lie to the church's claim that she is the faithful bride of the poor Jesus!

A big establishment like the Indian church necessarily needs protection from the powers-that-be for her survival and growth. The church therefore is very careful not to displease the government or its political parties. No word came from the church when emergency was declared in 1975; no word of denunciation when many Sikhs were massacred in Delhi; no word of condemnation over the Ayodhya outrage. It is crystal clear to all that the Indian church committed all these grave sins of omission lest the government and the political parties concerned should restrict the inflow of foreign money into her coffers or deny her permission to open new institutions or harass the present ones². Jesus'

1 Puthenpurackal Joseph, "Missionary and Missiological Challenges of Asian Churches Today" *IMR*, 15 (1993) pp 3-13. cf. pp 5-6. Desmond A. D' Abreo, *Turning the Tide of Injustice*, Mangalore 1991, pp. 241f.

2 Cf. J. R. Victor Karunan, "Indian Christians in the Cobweb of Hindutva

option for the poor fired him to denounce the oppressors to the point of risking his life, and here in India we have a church that claims to be his, deliberately keeping mum in the face of blatant criminalities evident to all! This church is afraid of supporting the just cause in the struggles of the fisherfolk, dalits, tribals and other victimized groups, because she does not want to compromise her interests which are the interests of this money-puff and power-puff institution that she verily is!

This institutionality of the church not only makes her a coward before political powers, but also enslaves her to the West which beefs her up with money and posts. Church leaders who have received their nominations from the West in virtue of their spirit of subservience and who are sustained by the mammon that comes from there, will never use their brains — if they have any! — to preach the Gospel to the poor of India, but will make positive efforts to repeat the gibberish printed in the West and to fall in line with the directives issued from there. Subservience to the princes of mammon, and not service to the poor, is what characterises ecclesiastical thinking and planning in India!

The spectre of fear stands tall and looms large in the Indian church. It is fear that makes her so very reluctant to change. The feeble hearted will desparately cling on even to a piece of straw and will stubbornly resist new attempts and experiments that sanity may suggest. Fear it is again that lies hidden beneath the Indian church's minority-complex. Pusillanimity of this minority church manifests itself in two ways. With frantic thrust she hurls herself headlong into all available means and possible ways of activities in obsequious subordination to the political state, so as to prove to the latter that this christian minority is very much involved in nation-building through its services in the fields of education, health-care, developmental projects etc. Secondly, she will with equally feverish haste and speed adapt, assimilate and integrate the cultural forms, symbols, rites etc. of the majority group in order to give it the impression that Christians are very much in the cultural and national mainstream. The result of it all is self-deception on the part of the church and shirking of her prophetic mission towards the country. Fear has a multipronged hold on the Indian church. She fears she might not get financial aid if she is not servile to the funding agencies; she is afraid of incurring the displeasure of the government that can prohibit her to receive foreign money; she is afraid she might be branded as non-Indian or anti-Indian if she does not indulge herself in inculturation; she is afraid of getting suspected and reprimanded by Rome if she does not slavishly

Cult?", *Indian Currents*, vol. IV, No. 24, March 8, 1993, p. 8.

Sandhya Srinivasan, "Majority Wins, Minority loses", *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, March 13-19, 1993, vol. CXIII 11, p. 19.

accept Roman faith-interpretations, disciplinary directives and organizational regulations. Fear-complex and the resultant sickening scrupulosity make the Indian church so nervous, cringing and opportunistic before the government, before the funding agencies and before the Vatican! Will this church ever opt for the poor at the risk of displeasing any of the above-mentioned trio?

Cowards usually feel the urge to project themselves as heroes and stooges will often play tyrants. Indian church in like manner and under like psychological and sociological sickness displays arrogant authoritarianism and domineering insolence towards her subjects! The redtape of bureaucracy so painfully experienced by Christians at our rectories, bishops' houses and other centres and institutions bear abundant and eloquent witness to the same. Will this church ever espouse the cause of the poor and exercise her prophetic mission in their defence?

Praxis in the Institutionalized Church

Monarchical structure is intrinsically evil. In the orthodox tradition of the Old Testament it was anathema (cf. Judg. 8: 22-23; 1 Sam. 8; Hos. 13, 11 etc.), because it would necessarily divide the people into two classes — the rulers and the ruled, the aristocracy and the proletariat — with the superior class exploiting the inferior. In the religious sphere monarchical structure will divide the people of God or the community of believers into clergy and laity and the evil of clericalism will exercise its tyranny over the layfolk. A theology concocted by the clergy will establish divine sanction for their domination over the laity. The insignia of the ruling class — from the tiara to the red sash — will be encrusted with mystical meanings. The triple power to govern, to teach and to sanctify would be the theological camouflage or mask for exercising full sway over all the aspects of the life of the unfortunate and non-privileged layfolk.

We see in the church of today not a community of believers, but a dichotomy between the hierarchy and the believers, the latter not participating with the former as free adult people, but as a people under the hierarchy, governed, taught and "sanctified" by it! We find in the church praxis: domineering governance with the help of bulls, conferring of jurisdiction and faculties, arrogant magisterial teachings through encyclicals, documents of all sorts, admonitions and warnings; dispensations and denials of "grace" through administration of the sacraments and the sacramentals with meticulous observance of the rites; ceremonial performance of functions and rigorously strict fulfilment of penance and other conditions, all fixed, commanded and demanded from the clerical top. Such an unchristian praxis makes the ecclesiastical power structure a veritable chimera and not the sign and sacrament of the amiable, compassionate and

humble Jesus who taught the ignorant, forgave sinners and healed the sick. Does one feel to be in the ambience of Calvary or the Cenacle while attending a Eucharistic celebration in any of the rites existing in India? Are not the celebrations of the Mass in the various rites but a manifestation of clerical domination and an ostentation of ecclesiastical pomp? The glittering vestments, costly vessels, flowers, gestures, ceremonies etc. associated with the celebration of the Mass came to the sanctuary from the palaces of the kings via the Patriarchates — ecclesiastical kingdoms! The prayers that emphasize the awful, the mysterious and the tremendous of the Eucharist were inspired by the postchristian and unchristian concepts and doctrines that made their way into the christian conceptual world via "adaptation" — a proclivity of the timid to welcome passing fads and trends for self-aggrandisement and self-justification! The prayers exalting the deity and deprecating the suppliant smack more of the servility of the serfs before their feudal lords than the trustful christian spirit which enables the believers to address God as Abba, loving Father! With all the reforms brought about by Vatican II, the celebration of the Mass still continues to be loaded with clerical regulations that keep the community as receivers of priestly ministrations and benedictions!

Compassionate Jesus forgiving repentant sinners is nowhere to be met and experienced in the way the sacrament of confession is administered and received in the church. The priest in the confessional is a judge endowed with power or faculty from his boss to absolve, and a lawyer versed in ecclesiastical casuistry; and the penitent stands there in the trappings of a civil delinquent accepting with docility the penance/penalty imposed on him! The sacrament of baptism has become almost like the conferment of membership in a corporation and does not symbolize rebirth into the family of the followers of Jesus. Confirmation likens itself to investiture of army recruits. Priestly ordination and episcopal consecration smack of allotment of civil officers to the various rungs of the ecclesiastical power ladder! The anointing of the sick, viaticum, indulgences etc. resemble recommendations and endorsements to be procured by those leaving their present establishment in order to get posting in a higher and new one! The legislation surrounding the sacrament of matrimony makes one wonder whether the unmarried clergy that spun up all these laws did it out of jealousy towards their lower brethren who decide to marry! Can a church that is so authority-conscious and power-oriented even in the administration of sacraments ever make option for the poor? As long as the church remains blind to the contradictions inherent in her structures and praxis, any claim that she makes of opting for the poor is blatant expression of and exercise in effrontery!

Challenges to the Indian Church

New ideas will not usher in a new praxis, unless structures are changed. It is anathema today to plead for structural changes in the church, because every institution and structure in the church has theological justification and canonical sanction! In sincere humility and humble sincerity before God the ecclesiastical super-structure should ask its conscience — if it has one — whether centuries or even millennia of tradition can make unchristian structures and praxis ever christian. Is not the mission of the church to be Jesus-like in this world by witnessing to the values of the Gospel, by living as Jesus lived? As in the Old Testament, so in the kingdom brought by Jesus too, the poor have the central stage. The kingdom is theirs; they inherit it and it is not to be gifted to them by some holy institution. The poor are not merely beneficiaries of the kingdom, they are its signs and symbols, actively realizing the salvation that the kingdom implies. If the poor Jesus proclaimed the kingdom to the poor, a rich church cannot do it. Only by becoming the community of the poor, in all aspects of its significance, can the church find her identity and fulfil her mission.

If so, this church should renounce mammon; she cannot serve two masters. It implies first the Indian church should cease to be a colony or an administrative unit of the worldwide christian establishment; she should cease to be at the receiving end of the so-called mission-aid. And if she can find genuine evangelical self-respect and gain the authentic sense of ecclesial dignity, not despite poverty, but precisely because of it, she can stand shoulder to shoulder with the churches of the so called first and second worlds holding aloft to them the model and example of her life and mission in supreme freedom from wealth, rooted in poverty, actualizing the conditions and situations in which Jesus her founder lived, struggled and died. Secondly it implies the Indian church emancipating herself from the funding agencies of the West, no longer compelled to kowtow to their dictates as to what projects and programmes she should undertake, how to serve her people and what to teach them. Once freed from the oppressive stranglehold of foreign money and from the debasing arrogance of its agencies, the church will feel no fear or inhibitions in fulfilling her prophetic mission by siding with the poor and denouncing injustice, societal and structural, national as well as international. Minority status will not create in her minority complex and the consequent fear, but it will rather be accepted by her as an opportunity and invitation from God to join hands with all those who are moved by the spirit of justice, righteousness and freedom. Freedom from mammon and freedom from fear will enable the church to be courageously open and supple to the inspirations of God's Spirit and to the challenges of his Word. God's Spirit will drive such a church to ventures and God's Word will empower her¹

to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant, so that God's kingdom may be ushered in and God's justice given to the poor.

In immediate consequence to the freedom from mammon, the church will find it easy to cast off the paraphernalia of her hierarchical superstructure and to clad herself in the garb of the servant church. Declericalisation will usher in the era of ecclesial brotherhood within and among the local churches and the various christian denominations. History is witness to the fact that the division of the church into various denominations came about from lust for power and greed for lucre. In contemporary India, wrangling for the rights of the rites and drive for territories and jurisdiction originate from greed for money and domination. Once the demon of mammon is exorcised from the church, the barriers of rites and the facades of doctrinal as well as structural/institutional differences will crash to the ground. The divided houses will coalesce into one Indian christian community and the one time princes and satraps of the divided ecclesiastical kingdoms will find their rightful place among the people in the struggle for God's kingdom. No longer shall the court theologians of the various Bishops' Conferences rake their brains for concocting dogmas and doctrines for buttressing the claims to greater power for the different rites, their kingdoms and their cultic idiosyncrasies. Once divested of its feudalistic insignia with all their glitter and glamour, church leadership will find it easier to take the last seat in the assembly of believers. The sheen of gold and the show of purple cast off, excellencies and lordships sent overboard, cathedrals and castles relegated to church museums, authorities in the church will feel unimpeded to kneel at the feet of the least of their brethren and wash their dirty feet, no longer in the pomp and ceremony of the liturgy on Maundy Thursday, but in the filth and squalor of the mortal and miserable life of these unfortunate ones. Only then and thus can the church teach with credibility that every authority that comes from God is for service to the poor.

With the collapse of the monarchical structure, the people of God will regain their God-given equality. No longer will the followers of Jesus be divided into Syrians and Latins, Nordists and Suddists, tribals and adivasees, savarnas and avarnas. Liturgical services will not be the monopoly of the higher clerical class, with the non-clerical class playing a passive or at the most a subordinate role; the worshipping community united under leaders chosen from among them, will commune and dialogue with the Word of God with simplicity of heart, docility of spirit and compunction of heart. This alone is the way and form for christians in twos and threes to be gathered in the name of Jesus and the real presence of Jesus in their midst will be a matter of experience and not one of mere doctrinal acceptance. Such

christianised worship will be one liberated from the erie of cult, from the maze of rubrics and above all from the clutches of clericalism. It will be the fount and source from which justice will roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream (Am. 5:24). Only a community living in justice and righteousness can radiate the love that will be the virtue commanded by Jesus as the specifically distinguishing characteristic of his disciples (Jn 13:35). The sacraments will verily become acts of Jesus and acts of the community of believers, no longer rites empowered with jurisdictional validity.

Once the community becomes the central organ of church activities, her services will no longer have to be tailored to suit the needs and advantages of the hierarchy. The needs of the people will receive top priority in her purpose and prospect. Quality education, profit-making, yearning for name, gaining influence with officers and similar mercenary and mundane motivations can thus be held at bay. Only thus can we wipe out the crime we commit today by channeling the money received in the name of the poor into our five star educational institutions, hospitals etc. to the utter chagrin and bitterness of the poor, in whose name we shed so much tears in teachings, preachings, propaganda and even in prayers!

The big fear and apprehension of the Indian church is that if the flow of foreign money is stopped or reduced, the various social services of the church which sustain thousands of the poor in our country will be paralyzed. There is no need of any super-sophisticated social analysis for anyone to see for himself that by and through the gigantic network of social services done by the church for centuries, it has been the church institutions that gained and grew in power and clout, not the poor sections of the people. The poor are not going to be liberated from poverty through ecclesiastical benevolence just as the poor nations are not going to become rich through the benevolence of the rich countries. Faith never died out in any heart owing to lack of money, but always through greed. Such a fear of the church is a distinct sign of her little faith! Certainly, if the flow of foreign money is stopped, the church establishment will become poor; church leaders and church officials will not be able to live as nicely as they do now. Will it not be to our consternation to think that the church establishment in poor India thrives on India's massive poverty? If poverty is eradicated from this country, the church will be losing her first and best source of income!!

In the question of the church's involvement in political action, the hierarchy is quick to point its finger to the sanctuary, the sacristy and the Sunday schools as the right and proper place for her clergy and religious. But this same hierarchy has no prick

of conscience at all in appointing quite a number of her clerics and religious as managers of printing presses, administrators of church-run workshops and factories, overseers of social projects, directors of estates, full time teachers of purely secular subjects in schools and colleges, and many other "worldly" undertakings and enterprises! If she is really and truly honest in her protestations and professions, that she is primarily sent for the spiritual good of the people, she should have the courage to entrust her temporalities to the layfolk. There are many lay people who have sufficient managerial and administrative skills. A body of such experts can take care of the temporalities of the church more efficiently than priests and religious. But alas! in the eventuality of such a transfer of responsibilities over the secular treasures of the sacred, spiritual and holy mother the church, the Indian hierarchy will certainly die of a massive heart-attack, for, where your treasure is, there will your heart be also (Lk 12:34). Should not the church remember that it is she, more than anyone else, who is counselled by Jesus: "go, sell what you have, and give it to the poor; and come, follow me" (Mk. 10:21)? Does the Indian church have anything that she has received in any way other than in the name and on the address of the poor? And does she not know, that if she is to be the sacrament and instrument of the kingdom of God which belongs only to the poor (cf. Lk 6:20 with Mk 10:25), her properties should belong to the poor? If she is obliged by the Gospel of Jesus to give her properties to the poor, she should be ready at least to hand over their administration to a board of lay people. But alas, the church has on her side theologians and Bible-scholars to bend the word of God to her advantage!

All these considerations per force will challenge the church to destructuralize and remodel the formation of the priests. The christian community will have to play its genuine and indispensable role in selecting, training, appointing and maintaining priests. Priests should cease to be officers of the bishops, but both the priests and the bishops should remember that they are servants of Jesus Christ for the sake of the people. No more shall the bishops ask the candidates to the priesthood if they promise obedience to them and to their successors, but whether they swear obedience to Jesus Christ and to his teachings and promise faithfulness to the community of believers!

Faith education or catechesis also will have to become Christ-centred and cease to be church-centred and cult-centred! Faith experience for the early christians was experience of the Risen Lord. Did it not mean for them, that the life of Jesus, which, from a human point of view, ended in such a tragic defeat, received maximum premium and value in the plan of God? This realization or experience demanded from the believers courageous following of the example

Jesus set before them. The courage of the Apostles and martyrs bears ample witness to the truth, that experience of the Risen Lord was something to be lived out with undaunted courage and heroic endurance. If christian life had been a set of cultic acts and ghetto practices of the believers, emperors would not have felt any need and urge to annihilate them. Today, how would our faith in the Risen Lord be actualized and concretized? Would it mean proselytisation on a big scale so that 2000 AD may witness christian revivalism crowned with unprecedented success? Would it mean proclaiming the uniqueness of Christianity's Founder in our religiously pluralistic India? Or should it mean relevantly doing Christ-like deeds in response to the challenges and exigencies of our times? Faith-conviction, to be genuine, should come from involvement and not through analysis and indoctrination. We see around us craving and clamouring for freedom arising with powerful and irrepressible force from the oppressed and the exploited masses; people aspire for well-being, not only for the elite, but for all; they want participation and sharing not only in the burdens of the nation, but also in its assets and achievements; they aspire for human community, for integrity of creation and harmony of nature. Behind and beneath these aspirations lies the stark realization that economic and technological gains attained at tremendous human and environmental cost have gone into the pockets of the few; that these few have power on their side and use it through mass media for bluffing the poor; through unjust international agreements, rapacious multi-national corporations and financial institutions for fettering the poor in their poverty and helplessness; through arrogant assertions of pseudorights and shrewd proposals for fleecing the poor. The aspirations of the masses are blocked by oppression, smothered by fanning up religious prejudices, hacked by the hysteria of communalism, and stunned by outbreaks of devilish terrorism. What should christian faith mean when our human house is on fire? Are we to take out processions with christian statues and banners, singing hosannas and alleluias through the main streets of our burnt-down cities and riot-hit areas? Or are we to remain indoors in our decision-making centres brooding profoundly for hatching out plans and strategies for saving our establishment, its assets and rights? Or should we incarnate and embody in our life the spirit of Jesus and his courage to love by getting deeply involved in the ferment of our nation, in the struggles, sufferings, victories, setbacks and frustrations of our people, setting our face towards the Calvaries of India and not towards its cathedrals? What else can be called option for the poor in contemporary context? But only a deinstitutionalized and declericalized church, freed from hierarchical imperialism, rite-rivalries, caste-antagonisms, dogmatic narrow-mindedness, disciplinary straight-jackets and, above all, from

greed and cowardice, will be able to rise to the occasion. Is the church being called upon to be utopian? If faith as small as a mustard seed can move mountains, a church that steps back fear-stricken and down-hearted at the sight of the huge mountain of challenges that stare straight into her eyes, let her at least be honest and sincere enough to admit that she abdicates faith and substitutes it with business calculations and shrewd ingenuity! Adieu to Jesus and Amen to Mammon! Not to opt for the poor in today's situation is to opt for mammon and to opt against the poor !!

George Koonthanam

Atman, the Locus of Eco-Theology - A New Arena for Indian Theology

Eco-crisis has acquired a global currency in the ongoing theological discussions and a new branch of theology is beginning to take shape with ecology as its focus. The author tries to highlight the inner tenor of eco-theology as holistic and its categories as mutuality, relationality, inter-dependence of God-Man-World. In developing such a holistic theology, India's insight of interiority and nature mysticism, especially atman as the unifying symbol, can play a decisive role.

Introduction

Eco-crisis and humanity's shared fear about its threat to the future human existence on Mother Earth is the new concern and focus of today's theology, cutting across cultural, linguistic and national constraints. Needless to say, eco-crisis has somehow given us a new platform, a new arena for a global collaboration and partnership from a spiritual as well as politico-economical perspective. Undoubtedly, only if this coming together of mankind to face this ominous crisis is based on an inner principle of unity can it be meaningfully addressed. That is to say, the collective combat against the forces of this crisis should have a theological and spiritual *locus* and *focus*. It is from this search for an inner common spiritual as well as theological fulcrum that an eco-theology can authentically emerge.

1. Today's new sensibilities for theology¹

Fortunately, the ethos and the present sensibilities of the post-modern era of our time are for an eco-theological hermeneutics of Reality. To put it succinctly, in the present post-modern era a holistic paradigm is replacing the atomistic model of Enlightenment. Past hierarchical dualism and divisions are losing ground to the new emphasis on the understanding of wholeness and interrelations of Reality. As poet Wallace Stevens expresses it brilliantly: "Nothing is itself taken alone. Things are because of interrelations or interconnections".² The new paradigm of interdependence and relationality of our existence points to the necessity of adopting an ecological perspective which recognizes human dependence on environment. This perspective is neither a mere sentimental, aesthetic love, nor one of an external pragmatic importance but is the integral awareness that, our individual existence, as Teilhard de Chardin says, is "one with the immensity of all that is and all that is still in the process of becoming"³. The Western sensibility fostered by Empiricism and Rationalism has been traditionally marked by atomistic, individualistic and reductionistic perspectives which underscore more on separation than on mutuality and reciprocity of beings. Eco-perspective, on the other hand, focuses on the inner awareness that we are not separate; we belong to an intricate *whole* of cosmos (eco-system): human beings, animals, plants, earth and air interact and relate in dynamic, mutually supportive ways.

2. What is eco-perspective?

The fundamental tenet of eco-theology should be the question of relationality of being. Western sensibilities, cultured by an atomistic perspective, underscore the separation of human beings from other non-beings, and reduce that which is not human to objects for human use. Eco-perspective challenges this anthropocentric approach; it advocates an organic model. In the organic model of Eco-vision

events appear to be more basic than substances, or to phrase it differently, individuals or entities always exist within structures of relationship; process, change, transformation and openness replace stasis, changelessness and completeness as basic descriptive concepts. This model is most appropriate to life, and hence the qualities of life — openness, relationship,

1 See Sallie McFague, *Models of God, Theology for an Ecological Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 3-28.

2 *Opus Posthumous* ed., S. J. Morris (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1957), 163, quoted in Sallie *Models of God*, 4.

3 Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Writings in Time of War*, trans. Rene Hague (London: William Collins Sons, 1968), 25.

interdependence, change, novelty and even mystery — become the basic ones for interpreting all reality⁴.

Naturally, the ecological paradigm of mutuality questions the old dualism and hierarchical gradation (spirit/flesh; human/non-human; supernatural/natural etc.). Its stress is, indeed, on the intrinsic relationship of entities, not as understood in the Newtonian mechanistic model of the gravitational forces. "By creating a pattern of external relations, it (ecological model) unites by symbiotic, mutual interdependencies, creating a pattern of internal relations. In organic model, one does not 'enter into relations' with others but finds oneself in such relationships as the most basic given of existence"⁵. Above all, the ecological, mutualistic model follows an ethic not only of justice but also of care and solidarity towards others and creation — cosmo-ethics. Of course, in eco-vision, we, rather than mere namers of and rulers over nature, are gardeners, stewards, co-creators and friends of creation.

Undoubtedly, eco-theology should have an experiential and a communitarian base and background. A living conversance with a religious tradition which caters to and cares for the tenor and trend of eco-theological nuances will definitely offer a momentum as well as a credibility to the eco-theology which is still in a formative stage. It is in this context that we have to see the theological and spiritual import of Indian insight and experience towards the development of Eco-theology.

3. Import of conversance with Hindu genius

The above discussion shows that the holistic-eco-paradigm can truly function only in the context in which modern man can rekindle the forgotten sense of the Sacred in creation. Moreover the eco-theology should have a new centre of unity which can function as the fulcrum of the eco-model of mutuality and relationality. It is precisely in this connection that we infer the significance of Indian experience and insight. A living contact with Indian (Hindu) nature mysticism and incorporation of Indian insight of interiority (*atman*) can be a critical point of departure for facilitating the process of the emerging eco-theology.

3. 1. Living acquaintance with the Indian nature mysticism

In spite of the vigorous Westernization programmes, India still lives in a Traditional-World. Ancient Wisdom profoundly prevails over her understanding and interpretation of God-man-

4 Sallie, *Models of God*, 10.

5. *Ibid.*, 11.

world relationship. Both the literate and illiterate are still under the sway of traditional perspective when it is a personal salvific matter. Here in India scientists, technocrats and country flock consider alike the Ganges and the Kavery as holy rivers; they make pilgrimages to these and take a dip in them for purification of sins; the Himalayas are holy abodes of gods for them, and it is the holy desire of Indians to make a pilgrimage to the *Gangotri*. Educationists and scientists look for an auspicious time when they take important decisions in their lives after consulting astrologers and horoscope. What we see here is that India still lives immersed and absorbed in nature mysticism. An Indian finds no contradiction while he holds simultaneously scientific knowledge and the traditional perspective! Such a balance between traditional wisdom and scientific knowledge is somehow lost in the West at the cost of holistic vision. What is the import of the traditional perspective in the construct of Eco-Theology?

The sense of the sacred is ubiquitous in the world of the traditional perspective. Everything is sacred and sacramental because it embodies and carries the imprint and the image of the Eternal which is the source of Tradition.

Man's sense of the sacred is none other than his sense for the Immutable and the Eternal, his nostalgia for what he really *is*, for he carries the sacred within the substance of his own being and most of all within his intelligence which was created to know the Immutable and contemplate the Eternal⁶.

The tradition extends this sense of the sacred, and creates a world, a society and a culture where everything is conceived and articulated and expressed in the Presence. This feel of the Presence in our relation to creation makes our relationship to cosmos holistic and inclusive. That is to say, we articulate and interpret our existence in its intrinsic relation to the total reality whose substratum is this Presence. The traditional perspective is not critical of the achievements of the Modern Age but of the premise and the foundations upon which modernism stands. "What tradition criticizes in the modern world is the total world view, the premises, the foundations which, from its point of view, are false so that any good which appears in this world is accidental rather than essential"⁷. It is only through the resuscitation of traditional wisdom that an eco-theological holistic vision can be unfolded and convincingly conveyed to the masses.

Surprisingly enough, modern science which has played a decisive role in the process of secularization is beginning to find its summit in Eastern wisdom and vision. As we have seen above, the New Physics destroyed the rigid dualism and the absolute

6 Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Knowledge & the Sacred* (New York: Crossroad, '81), 76.

7 *Ibid.*, 84, 85.

empirical objectivism of the Classical Physics. The ideas of the ancient world, like harmony, organic unity, symmetry are validated by the tenets of the New Science. India keeps alive this Sacred Presence. A living dialogue with India will enable western theology to rediscover the theological significance of traditional perspective in the process of developing Eco-Theology. It is through two main concepts, *māya* (*śakti*) and *līla* that India keeps herself alive and vibrant in the Sacred Presence.

3. 1. 1. The divine presence as *mīyā* and *śakti*

"All this universe is pervaded by Me in My unmanifested form; all beings exist in Me, but I do not abide in them"⁸. This verse from the *Bhagavad Gītā* suggests that the creation is precisely as much as is being penetrated by the presence of God. Śaṅkara would explain that in the deepest centre of beings, the Presence dwells as pure consciousness and source of all knowledge⁹. The Occident, especially the medieval theologians, explained God's presence in creation by the notion of causality¹⁰. But India has preferred to remain captivated by the deifying and beatifying Presence in the created world. India too has recognized that the penetrating presence of God is the ground of creation which otherwise may fall into non-being! Krishna teaches: *na'sato vidyate bhavo na'bbavo vidyate sataḥ* (The unreal has no existence; the real never ceases to be)¹¹. The creature exists because the eternal resides in its depth, and is its constituent.

But, how do the One and the many, the Being and beings, exist together without contradicting each other in the *samsara*, the world of manifestation? The Vedāntins answer the question with the help of the concept of *māya* (the mysterious skill of gods) which is neither being, nor non-being, nor being-non-being. In the *Bhagavad Gītā*, Krishna says: "Though I am unborn, imperishable and the Lord of beings, yet subjugating My *Prakṛti*, I come into being by My own *Maya*"¹². Commenting on this passage, Śaṅkara wrote in *Gītabhāṣya*: "Though I am unborn... I appear to be born and embodied, through my own *māya*, but not in reality, unlike others"¹³. Krishna is only *dehavanīva* (becomes as if he is embodied) through his *māya*. Interpreting this passage Ramanuja said that the *māya* is the divine wisdom (*jñāna*) and will (*saṁkalpa*) through which the Supreme Lord

8 *Bhagavad Gītā* 4. 9.

9 Sankara, *Upadesha Sāharsī*, I, 1,

10 *Summa Theologica*, I. Q. 3, Art. 3.

11 *Bagavat Gītā* 2. 16.

12 *Bhagavad Gītā* 4, 6.

13 Sankara, *Gītabhāṣya*, trans., A. Mahadeva Sastry (Madras: 1961), quoted in Mariasusai Dhavamony, *Classical Hinduism* (Roma: Universita Gregoriana, 1982), 95.

individualizes himself and appears before his devotees. In this sense, *maya* is the *śakti*, the power, the energy¹⁴. Swami Abhishiktananda would say that for the Indian, perhaps more than anyone else, the earth sings the glory of God and is full of His magnificence; she vibrates in the power of God (*śakti*), "In fact no other country has been so intensely aware as India of the Presence — an eminently active Presence, the whole world of the divine *Śakti*, something resembling the *shekinah* of traditional Judaism. India has felt this Presence¹⁵ since the earliest Vedic era, a presence which is inherent in each being that comes from the hands of the Creator, and in every phase of the life of man and the universe, the daily, monthly, and yearly cycles"¹⁵.

Maya as the Presence is the Epiphany of God and is also understood as the Spirit which is operative in the process of evolution; it is, as well, agile in the process of involution, the return of beings to the One. So it is the *maya* which works both in the disintegration and integration of the universe¹⁶. Thus understood, created beings are manifestations of the divine mystery in the *maya*, not projections of the human spirit. Indeed, the strict Vedantins say that the problem of multiplicity is only the work of the ignorant human mind: *Kalpayati atman atmanam atmadeva svamayaya*¹⁷.

3. 1. 2. *Lila*: Manifestation of God's Spontaneity and freedom

The epiphany of God in creation is the divine play (*līla*). *Lila* signifies God's creative activity in the absolute spontaneity in which he creates the whole world. The *Brahma Sūtra* says: "*na prayojanatvat, lokavat tu līlakaivalyam*"¹⁸. "Pure" activity can be properly described as "playful" because the game is played not as "work"; work is performed with a view to secure some end; the worker works for what he needs, the player plays because of what he is¹⁹. The notion of divine "play" occurs

14 See *The Gītābhāṣya of Ramanuja*, trans. M. R. Sampatkumaran (Madras: 1969), See also Mariasusai Dhavamony, *Classical Hinduism*, 95–99.

15 Abhishiktananda, Henri Le Saux, *Guru and Disciple*, [trans. Heather Sandeman (London: SPCK, 1974)], 55.

16 Henri Le Saux, Abhishiktananda, *La montée au fond du cœur* (Paris: O. E. I. L., 1986), 105.

17 "The divine Self disposes itself through its self by its own *maya*". Gaudapada, *Kareka*, 2. 12,

18 "Brahma's creative activity is not undertaken by way of any need on his part, but by way of sport". *Brahma Sūtra*, II, 1, 32, 33.

19 Coomaraswamy, 2: *Selected Papers Metaphysics*, Ed. Roger Lipsey (Princeton, New Jersey; Princeton University Press, 1977), 150.

repeatedly in the *R̥g Veda*²⁰, and is fully represented in the *Upaniṣads*. They speak of God as the incorporeal Spirit (*aśarira ātman*), the Universal Spirit (*viśvātman*), the Universal Creator, the Universal Enjoyer, and the Universal Life²¹. He is the Universal Lord of sport and pleasure in which he participates without being moved, being at peace with himself (*śāntātman*)²².

"The activity of God is called a 'game' precisely because it is assumed that *he* has no ends of his own to serve"²³. Supreme detachment and supreme involvement are the inner tenor of the divine play. Thus creation is the divine play of God's supreme spontaneity manifested in a sportful delight. Swāmi Abhishiktānanda writes: "The creation is as imperceptible as the divine liberty is. Nonetheless it is real in the measure in which the liberty is identical with the divine essence, and the creation is *maya* in the measure in which it is distinguished. But the distinction between God's liberty and essence, isn't it already *maya*? Yet the creation is real since God is really and essentially free... And the creation is really and essentially one play, one dream as well... And this dream is constituent in the eternity of God"²⁴. Therefore everything is true in creation; every instant of the time is co-existent with all eternity, and fundamentally it is the only mystery of the Being.

Indian consciousness absorbed in the Presence prefers metaphorical and mythological framework towards creation to a conceptual and analytical perspective. It is through nature symbolism and myths that Indian religious imagination unveils itself. Such an approach helps India to hold an eco-holistic paradigm in the hermeneutics of Reality. In the Hindu religious tradition natural forces and objects have been deified from the Vedic period to this day. For example, *agni* (fire) has prominent place in Vedic hymns; it is the cosmic force and energy which pervades the entire creation; it is the sacrificial fire, divine manifestation, priest to men and gods²⁵. Again the Vedic creation myth speaks of a golden embryo or egg (*Hiraṇyagarbha*) which contained the whole of cosmos. After a long period of incubation, it split open and the whole cosmos came to be. This myth suggests that the universe is a unified and integrated living whole and one and the same energy activates the whole reality²⁶.

20 *R̥g Veda*, IX, 20, 7; X, 3, 5; X, 79, 6.

21 *Chandogya Upaniṣad* 8, 12; *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* 5, 1.

22 *Bṛhadaraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 4, 3, 13.

23 Coomaraswamy, 2: *Selected Papers*, 158.

24 Abhishiktānanda, *La montée au fond du coeur*, 183, 184.

25 See *R̥g Veda* I, 1; 35; 145; II, 8; III, 18; VII, 10.

26 See *Hiraṇyagarbha R̥g Veda* X, 121.

Another famous creation myth describes that the universe was created from the sacrifice of *Adipuruṣa*. It was through the dismembering of the body of the First-Man that the universe is created. It also points out clearly that the whole universe is a living organism whose inner dynamism is interdependence and reciprocity²⁷. What is attempted to drive home is that the Indian Nature mysticism gives us a living eco-theological context, text and perspective.

3. 2. Atman, mystical locus of Eco-theology

The very tenor of Eco-theology is indeed the interdependence and mutuality of God-Man-World. This web of eco-relationship should have a theological and spiritual centre which unifies and integrates the dynamics of this holistic phenomenon. If the *locus* or the centre of eco-vision is understood in reference to the interiority of the human rather than to an exterior *point*, then the inclusive and universal nuance of that centre would be more appealing and acceptable to the world community. For, such a centre will naturally be able to remain mystical and experiential in nature and content, and will consequently be free from the cultural and religious bias. It is precisely here that we find the import of Indian insight of interiority — the call of *atman*.

As indicated earlier, the empirical science overemphasized the objective knowledge at the expense of human's subjective core which actually integrates and synthesises the variegated experience. What happened in the West is that the objective truth eventually began to assert its ascendancy over subject and its intuitive powers. Fr. Bede Griffiths says: "Our success in the material world in building up a great civilization has left us with a sense of frustration in human life, a feeling of emptiness within, a lack of reality, an inability to touch the inner centre of being where we are at rest and from where we can go out to meet our fellow men, go out to meet God, but to which we can always return²⁸". This unifying centre has to be regained first and foremost to develop an enduring holistic eco-theology.

The grace of India is essentially a calling to interiority — *atman*. "Man is an interiority, an in-self. It is this very interiority that gives him his identity and permits him to assimilate the data received from without"²⁹. Once he/she is in the deepest centre of his/her being, and is being seized by the ineffable mystery of Self, thenceforth there exists neither a Thou nor an I. The

27 See *Puruṣa Sūkta Ṛg Veda* X, 90.

28 Bede Griffiths, *Christian Ashram* (London: Darton, Longmann & Todd Ltd, 1966), 84.

29 Henri Le Saux (Swami Abhishiktananda), *The Eyes of Light* (Denville, New Jersey: Dimension Books, 1983), 30.

mystery of Self is the secret of the non-duality of Being, (*advaita*). Swami Abhishiktananda would say that Self is the royal cell, the reserved abode of the Creator and the created; it is the secret of the unity, the *a-dvaita*; it is the in-separability of the *Pneuma* from the *Paramatman* (supreme Self), and from the *Kevala*³⁰. The secret of the Self as the *advaita* of Being is the intense proximity with God — the Presence (*ASTI*, IS). This Presence is the mystery of the co-existence of One and many in the indefinable self (*guh yataman rajaguhyam pavitram idamuttamam*)³¹. So the *jñānin* of India would say that the transcendent God who is the Self is the very 'heart' of the human, the very source of the enunciation of 'You' that I say to Him. As long as one has not entered this source within, the self from where the very otherness is born, one caresses only idols. The first and the foremost work of man is therefore to enter within in order to encounter himself there. One does not encounter oneself independent of God — one does not encounter God independent of self. Hence, what is needed is *atmadṛṣṭi* (vision of the *atman*); it is the domain of the auto-effulgence (*sva-prakāśa*) from all duality; here all reflex actions are excluded; it is fulguration itself at the depth of self; it is the reference of non-reference, the moment of non-time, the space of non-space. In the *svaprakāśa*, I exist because of God's presence, and God exists because of my presence³². This shows that the holistic vision of eco-theology spontaneously finds itself at home with *advaita*.

For the wise human of India, Reality is Self, and Self is all. Self as the Source and the Summit is everywhere, in the centre of every self and in the centre of every *I*. There is no event in the life of the human or in humanity, great or small, which is not moved by Self. It is by the divine play (*līla*) that the Self is realized in every instant, in every act, thus every act and instant is open to the Eternal. For the one who has passed on to *satori* (illumination), it is only the Self everywhere, in the water which flows, in the clouds which drift away, and in the child which sings... in the work of each being³³. Residing in the inner centre (*guhā*, self) of Being, the human can intuitively discern (*pratyabhijñā*) the *advaita* of Being — the Knowledge of non-duality. But he/she must plunge into the bosom of every creature, in the same manner as God himself plunges therein for all eternity. What is needed is the point of view of God which is God's own vision of Himself. This vision of God is

30 Henri Le Saux O. S. B. Swami Abhishiktananda, *Intériorité et révélation* (Sisteron: Presence, 1982), 88–89.

31 "The secret of the secrets, the royal secret, the supreme purifier" *Bhagavad Gīta* 9, 2.

32 See Abhishiktananda, *Intériorité et révélation*, 92–94.

33 See *Ibid.*, 42, 43.

the Knowledge — the eternal life which is, as the New Testament says: "Know God as he knows Himself"; "but then face to face" (1 Cor 13:12); "We shall see Him as He is" (1 Jn 3:2).

For the Hindu *jñānin*, there is only one reality in this world of division and becoming: it is the irresistible movement of beings towards the *atman* (self), the slow re-entry within³⁴. Swami Abhishiktananda writes that India's thought increasingly interiorizes itself; India soon understood that the Real which is divined as the Transcendent in the Vedas, was *within*, the inmost mystery of inwardness³⁵. The awakening of the human to God transpires on a level of inwardness much deeper than any level attained by thought — the place that the *Upanisads* call *guha*, the cave of inwardness, the inmost crypt. "A wise man, indeed, saw the Ātman (soul) inward, with his gaze turned inward, seeking the eternal."³⁶

3. 2. 1. The Ātman, inner principle of Eco-vision

In the Upaniṣadic literature, the image that often recurs is that of the *guha* (cave), the 'cave of the heart'³⁷. It is the pre-eminent secret place which the human at all costs must discover for his/her salvation. Since the Vedic age India's enquiry nostalgically was attached to this mysterious place of immortality. It is the 'golden gateway' that opens on the Real; it is the golden cup that at once contains and conceals the supreme object of the soul's desire³⁸. Life as a matter of fact is only in this 'cave of the heart', for it is there that the eternal mystery of the human springs up. All the rest, *namarūpas*, body, senses, words are only signs which pass away. Thus "Man is an interiority, an in-self. It is the very interiority that gives him his identity, and permits him to assimilate the data received from without"³⁹.

The secret of *guha* is the mystery of the *atman*. This self (*atman*) is infinite and immutable consciousness; as the subtlest of the subtle, and the greatest of the great, the Self resides in the heart of every creature⁴⁰. This self is bodiless among the bodies, and the permanent in the midst of the impermanent⁴¹. He is the sole intelligent principle of the senses and the mind — "the ear of the ear, the thought of thought, the speech of speech

34 *Ibid.*, 41, 42.

35 Abhishiktananda, *The Eyes of Light*, 82. *Katha Upaniṣad* 3, 1.

36 *Katha Upaniṣad* 4, 1b.

37 See *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 8, 1, 2, 3. See *Katha Upaniṣad* 2, 12; *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* 2, 1; *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 2, 1, 1.

38 See *Iśa Upaniṣad* 15.

39 Abhishiktananda, *The Eyes of Light*, 30.

40 *Katha Upaniṣad* 2, 20.

41. *Katha Upaniṣad* 2, 21, 22,

...the breath of breath, and the eye of eye"⁴². He is the *prana*, and the *pranja* which encompasses the body, and keeps it erect, and also is the unity of the vital powers⁴³. Thus the *atman* is the seer, the thinker, the hearer, and the knower⁴⁴.

Moreover, the *atman* is present in this world as its centre and inner meaning. It is the fire (*visvambhara* that which maintains all) which lies concealed in the fuel preserving the fire. He who has the knowledge of *atman* knows everything in this world⁴⁵. The *atman* is like the musical instrument out of which the world arises like the sound. So the world is not able to be grasped independent of *atman*⁴⁶. Like salt dissolved in water, the *atman* is present in the five elements out of which the world has originated⁴⁷. "Just as the sparks out of the blazing fire scatter towards all sides, so also out of this *Atman* all life-forces"⁴⁸. Hence *atman* is the dear one in whom all desires find their fulfilment; *atman* is the truth, the *prana*, the bird of passage (*Harisa*), the controller, the unshakable one; dwells in the fire, it dwells in the heart, and it dwells in the sun; it is all alone the only one; it assumes all forms but remains concealed⁴⁹. Self which is the *antaryamin*, the Inner Controller of the whole world, and which, just like a blazing fire, assumes all forms (*viśva-rūpa*), is also understood as the 'Real of the real' (*satyasya satya*)⁵⁰ — the Brahman, the Absolute.

Above all, the *Upanisads* see *atman* as the same as the Eternal, the changeless principle which indwells and controls the whole universe. This identification is quite obvious in the following well known *mahavakyas* (dicta) from the *Upanisads*. The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* proclaims, "Who knows: 'I am Brahman' becomes this All"⁵¹ whereas the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* begins with the verse, "This whole world is Brahman; the self is Brahman"⁵². The sage of the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, Yājñavalkya teaches "*ayam atma brahma* (this self is Brahman)"⁵³ and the

42 *Kena Upaniṣad* 1, 1–2. See also *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 4, 4, 18.

43 *Kausī takī Upaniṣad* 3, 3; *Chandogya Upaniṣad* 8, 12, 4–5.

44 BU 3, 7, 23.

45 *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 1, 4, 7–8; 4, 5b, *Chandogya Upaniṣad* 6, 1.

46 *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 2, 4, 7–9.

47 *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 2, 4, 7–9; 2, 4, 12–14; *Chandogya Upaniṣad* 6, 13.

48 *Kausī takī Upaniṣad* 3, 3.

49 *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 4, 8, 9; *Maitrayaṇa Upaniṣad* 6, 34. *Maitrayaṇa Upaniṣad* 7, 7.

50 See *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 3, 7, 1–22; 2, 3, 6.

51 *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 1, 4, 10.

52 *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* 2; see also *Chandogya Upaniṣad* 7, 25, 1.

53 See *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 2, 5, 19.

sage Udalaka instructs, "*tat tvam asi* (that thou art)" in the *Chandogya Upanisad*⁵⁴. So, according to Upanisadic thought, the final mystery is that interior mystery which one uncovers in one's inmost self, the *atman* "pure of all taint"; it is this very mystery that reveals in the most distant spaces of the beyond, the full immovable *Brahman* himself, the principle, the life and the being of All⁵⁵. As the subtlest of the subtle and the greatest of the great, *Brahman* dwells as the self in the heart of the creation⁵⁶. The one who knows *that* thread by which this world and the other world and all beings have been bunched together, that inner director who inwardly regulates this world and all other worlds, knows everything⁵⁷. For him Reality is "Plenitude" as said in the 'Peace Invocation' of *Iśa Upanisad*. This Fullness (*pūrṇam*) is *advaita* (non-duality) — the basis of the Indian holistic vision of reality.

A long discussion on *advaita* is beyond the scope of this paper. In the Upanisadic Metaphysics, *advaita* stands for *ātma vidyā* (doctrine of true self). *Advaita* simultaneously opposes both pure monism and pure dualism (*dvaita*). At the same time, it transcends as well as embodies both the extremes⁵⁸. In other words, Upanisadic *advaita* corresponds to the ontological tension between the two poles of Reality — One and many. That is to say, Reality is neither One nor many. Reality is the "advaitic-tension" between these two *poles* of Reality. This advaitic tension is the co-incidence and simultaneity of the Non-Manifest-manifest (*a-rūpa-rūpa*), of which man can be profoundly aware at the depth (*atman*) of his being. The following passage of Coomaraswami points to this fundamental tension of Reality in a remarkable way: "All tradition speaks in the last analysis of God as an inconnumerable and perfectly simple Identity, but also of this Supreme Identity as an identity of two contrasted principles, distinguishable in all composite things, but coincident without composition in the One who is no thing. The Identity is of Essence and Nature, Being and Nonbeing, God and Godhead — as it were masculine and feminine"⁵⁹. It can further be said that Supreme Identity (*tad ekam*) found in the Upanisadic identity statements ("*Aham Brahmasmi*" "*Tat-tvam asi*") is not merely in itself "without duality" (*dvaita*); this is an identity of many different things if considered from the external point of view. It

54 *Chandogya Upanisad* 6, 8, 7.

55 Abhishiktananda, *The Eyes of Light*, 83.

56 *Mahanarayana Upanisad* 10, 1.

57 *Bṛhadaraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 3, 7, 1.

58 See Panikkar, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics*, 281.

59 Coomaraswamy, *2 Selected Papers, Metaphysics*, 231.

does not mean only that "a first unitary principle transcends the reciprocally related pairs of opposites (*dvandvau*)... but rather that the Supreme Identity... subsumes in its infinity the whole of what can be implied or represented by the notions of the infinite and the finite, of which the former includes the latter, without reciprocity"⁶⁰.

Indeed, the advaitic experience of Fullness (*purnam*) at the realm of interiority (*atman*) offers us an interior centre (*locus*) which offers a credible experiential principle of the holistic vision of eco-theology. Further, this inner experience — *advaita* understood as the creative tension ('implicate' and 'enfolded' order!) between One and many — points to a new theological and mystical depth and dimension of the eco-categories of mutuality and relationality.

Conclusion

The above discussion was highlighting the possible contributions from the part of India toward the emerging eco-theology. Indian insight of interiority and the living nature mysticism do offer us a text and a context for eco-perspective. At a time when the West is increasingly attracted to Eastern Religions and mysticism, a creative conversance with Indian traditions to facilitate the eco-discussion will give a greater credibility and psychological intensity to this new theology of environment. More importantly, India's unique contribution is her insight of interiority as the theological as well as spiritual basis of eco-holistic theology. Compared to a distanced personal God as the centre of eco-theology an interior centre like *atman* is more capable of embodying a holistic orientation.

The most distinctive aspect of the Judeo-Christian tradition is its understanding of personal God — God as Thou and the conception of a personal God is fundamental for our relating to all reality in the categories of mutuality, respect, care and responsibility. Nevertheless, the agential aspects of the Western theology prominently portray this personal God as liberator or redeemer of humanity and circumscribe Him in the domain of persons and history, leaving much of the cosmos unaddressed⁶¹. Besides, the metaphors like King, Ruler, Lord, Master which represent this personal God entail the ideas of separation and control; they are hierarchical, imperialistic and dualistic, emphasising the gap between God and the world, and the total dependence of the world on God. The concepts which these metaphors correspond

60 *Ibid.*, 198,

61 See Sallie, *Models of God*, 18.

to, are absolute, complete, transcendent and omnipotent, and do not convey straightaway the sense of mutuality, shared responsibility and reciprocity. Naturally the viability of the personal God is critically seen in the theology of environment. Attempts are made to understand God as the "unifying symbol of those powers and dimensions of the ecological and historical feedback network, which create and sustain and work to further enhance life"⁶². Here Indian insight of Interiority can play a crucial role of supplying a credible unifying symbol of the complicated web of eco-relations. Perhaps, by interpreting the incarnate Word at the atmic realm, Indian theology can embrace a new orientation and intensity in the wider context of the present ecological debate.

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62 Gordon Kaufman, *Theology for a Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press 1985), 56, quoted in Sallie, *Models of God*, 18.

Ph. D. and M. Phil. Programmes in Christian Studies at Madras University

Many of our readers are aware, a Chair in Christianity was instituted at the University of Madras in 1984. It has been admitting candidates for Ph. D. in Christianity since 1985. There are 14 Ph. D. scholars at present, from a variety of backgrounds.

By a Memorandum of Agreement between the Catholic Archdiocese of Madras-Mylapore and the University of Madras, the Chair was raised to a full-fledged University Department on 6th March 1992. As part of the expansion plan, the University has recruited new teaching staff. In addition to Fr. Thomas George who continues as the Head, Fr. Felix Wilfred was appointed as Professor and Fr. Joe Mannath SDB, as Reader.

Suitably qualified candidates may apply to do their Ph. D. or M. Phil. in Christian Studies at the Department. A maximum of 10 M. Phil. students will be admitted for the 1993-1994.

Eligibility requirements for Ph. D.

- a) A Master's Degree in Christian Philosophy or Theology (M. A. or M. Th or Licentiate) from a recognized University, with above average grades.
- b) Two references from competent persons regarding the candidate's academic achievements and ability to do research.
- c) Mastery of English (written and spoken) and the ability to read at least two other languages.

Eligibility requirements for M. Phil.

- a) Master's Degree in Christian Theology or Philosophy (M. Th., M. Ph., Licentiate from Pontifical Universities or Affiliated Institutes); M. A. in Christianity; Master's Degree in Indian

Religions, M. A. in Philosophy, Psychology, Anthropology, Anthrology or Sociology.

- b) Candidates holding a Master's Degree in subjects other than Christian Philosophy or Theology or M. A. in Christianity, should have an undergraduate degree in Christian Theology or Philosophy (B. Th. or B. Ph.).
- c) The candidate's suitability for M. Phil. research should be demonstrated through a written test.

For further information, please contact the Department at one of the following addresses:

1. Head
St. Thomas Department of Christian Studies
University of Madras
Madras 600 005.
2. Fr. Thomas George
Archbishop's House,
Santhome
Madras 600 004

Gurukul Lutheran Theological College and Research Institute, Madras - 10

Introducing M. Th. in Women Studies

**A New Higher Theological Discipline with a Long History of
Involvement**

Gurukul's new venture of M. Th. in Women Studies is a unique contribution to the world of theological education. It is not a mere ambitious academic initiative but an outcome of a necessity that Gurukul has realised through its continued and deeper involvement in the life and ministry of the churches in India to reclaim the essential feminist dimension in theology and thus set new patterns for the church of the future.

Despite the veritable explosion of knowledge about women's issues in the secular realm and the development of courses to teach them, the dominant quantum of present theological education does not reflect any sensitivity or exposure to women's issues or the feminist of analysis of society and culture. Gurukul's continued partnership with the Women's Desk of the United Evangelical Lutheran Churches in India on issues such as women's education, development, organisation and research and the more ecclesiastical issues of ordination, equal participation and leadership for over two decades has brought to fore the need to substantially revise the content of ministerial training. Moreover, the churches' slowness in responding to the issues of justice, human rights, development and freedom within and outside has also provoked Gurukul to bring in the issues of 'life in community' as a part and subject of theological education. This induction of Women Studies as a separate area of study at the higher level would hopefully help in considerably reformulating the priorities and rephrasing the language of an otherwise male-centred, church-oriented theological education.

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